

fifth estate

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***The Hope of Resistance
vs the Hope of Empire***

***Lessons from the
'99 Seattle Demos***

***New Adventures
In Criminalizing
Dissent***

A **TRIBUTE** *to the*
RADICAL IMAGINATION
of **URSULA K. LE GUIN**





“We are going to inherit the earth.”

There is not the slightest doubt about that. The bourgeoisie may **blast and burn** its own world before it finally leaves the stage of history. We are not afraid of ruins. We who ploughed the prairies and built the cities can build again, **only better next time**. We carry a new world, here in our hearts. That world is growing this minute.”

— Durruti



A **TRIBUTE** *to the* **RADICAL IMAGINATION** *of* **URSULA K. LE GUIN**

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The *Fifth Estate* is a cooperative, non-profit, anti-authoritarian project published since 1965 by a volunteer collective of friends and comrades. We are committed to non-dogmatic, action-oriented writing and activity to bring about a new world. As opposed to professionals who publish to secure wages, or those who invest in the media information industry, we produce this magazine as an expression of our resistance to an unjust and destructive society.

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TRUE VOYAGE IS RETURN

By the time you hold this issue in your hands, *Fifth Estate* will have entered into its 45th year of continuous publication! This is no small feat for an all-volunteer run publication operating on a shoestring budget, and it would not be possible without the continued support of our subscribers, sustainers, and readers like you. For this, you have the heartfelt thanks of everyone in the *FE* collective. That said, if you are not yet a subscriber, please consider subscribing so we can continue to bring you compelling stories and well argued essays from *FE*'s unique perspectives (see our subscription call out on page 37). If you are already a subscriber, consider donating or sponsoring a subscription to a prisoner (*FE* provides free subscriptions to prisoners).

2010 is shaping up to be an exciting year for *FE* with new issues (see our call for submissions on page 43), a new and more user-friendly website, and a new working relationship with Political Media Review <www.politicalmediareview.org> that will further expand our presence on the web.

In this issue of *Fifth Estate*, we honor the life and work of Ursula K. Le Guin, who celebrated her 80th birthday in October 2009. In a career spanning only a bit longer than the publication of this magazine, Le Guin has served as an

inspiration, not only to us, but to millions of readers around the world who read her fiction, poems, and essays. Highlights of her life and work appear in a brief biographical sketch by Paul J. Comeau (page 10), an interview exclusively for *FE* probes the inspiration behind some of her most celebrated works (page 12), and we feature a reprint of her 1982 essay "A Non-Euclidean View of California..." with an introduction by John Clark (page 14). Also featured in this issue are a number of critical essays and appreciations of Le Guin's works by Oshee Eagleheart, Josh Gosicak, Jamie Heckert, and *FE* collective member Andy Sunfrog.

In addition to our featured section, we have a retrospective by organizer David Solnit on the anniversary of the Seattle WTO Protests, a reaction to Obama's Nobel Prize win by long time *FE* collective member Don LaCoss, letters, reviews, and more.

Enjoy the issue, and thanks as always for your support and attention.

—The *FE* Editorial Collective



LETTERS

Our readers respond

Send letters to fe@fifthestate.org or *Fifth Estate*, POB 201016, Ferndale, MI 48220
All formats accepted including typescript & handwritten; letters may be edited for length.



FASCISM WITHOUT PRIVATE PROPERTY?

Spencer Sunshine's review of John Zerzan's *Twilight of the Machines* begins promisingly enough with a brief summation of Zerzan's history and a lengthy description of *Twilight's* contents.

The turning point is Sunshine's confession that "it is difficult to understand how he conceives of the relationship between technology, civilization, and symbolic representation." Sunshine might have constructed a critique of Zerzan from this alleged lack of clarity. Instead, he offers the bizarre criticism that Zerzan has not adequately explained why his views are different from, and incompatible with, fascism.

Sunshine suggests any discussion of the "unmediated self" exposes one to the contagion of fascism. One does not have to be a mystic to recognize the validity of their experiences, however, which seem to attest to the reality, indeed, of an unmediated self. Perhaps this is a phantom limb, so to speak, of an originally unmediated community, or perhaps it's all credulity, but it seems a rather far stretch to task those who derive inspiration from Jung, say, with affinities to fascism.

Sunshine sees Zerzan's discussion of unmediated community and his contempt for "the Left" [sic] as an invitation to fascists. He does not see this discussion, to the contrary, as emptying the oxygen which fascism needs to smolder on. The appeal of fascism was squarely addressed by Arthur Miller, at least.

In his play *Incident at Vichy*, he mocks his Marxist character by noting the vast extent of support for fascism among the very workers chosen by History, supposedly, to suppress it. Might the very rejection of any discussion of mediation on the part of "the Left" help explain that support?

Sunshine says it is "easy to see why Nazis see his attack on symbolic thought

as the same as their attack on the Jews who they claim are the source of alienation, decadence, and abstraction. Nazis see his championing of the unmediated community as the same as their desire for a homogenous, racially pure community, which they think will exist as a unified whole, free of fragmentation."

Maybe it's so easy for Sunshine to accept this grotesquely crude "parallel" because the Left to which he reflexively defers seldom discusses that most corrosive and fundamental agent of historical separation, the institution of Property.

Since Sunshine demands an explanation of how Zerzan's views are fundamentally different from and incompatible with fascists, I offer this formulation for his consideration: Zerzan's vision of unmediated community presumes the absence of private property and state power; clearly, fascism is inconceivable without the presence of both.

One would like to see a deeper level of criticism brought to bear against Zerzan. Alas, it will not come from those ever reluctant to cut their moorings from the familiar and commonplace. These critics contrast strikingly with Zerzan, whose long-term project of loosening our attachment to the deeper forms as well as the superficial charms of civilized culture has helped expand the anarchist critique from exploitation to domestication and from capitalism to civilization.

Dan Todd
Tucson, Arizona

GUILT BY ASSOCIATION

In his review of John Zerzan's book *Twilight of the Machines*, Spencer Sunshine has much to say of Zerzan's supposed "fascist references."

It is undeniable that Zerzan has analyzed some of the concepts previously addressed by philosophers who were (sometimes very marginally) involved in the fascist movement. Sunshine doesn't

neglect to point out that Zerzan is not a fascist, but this is still a guilt by association tactic, and it is absurd, as a few examples shall illustrate.

One of the so-called fascists referenced by Zerzan is Oswald Spengler. Spengler was a major influence on historian Arnold Toynbee, whose *A Study of History* laid the background for Fredy Perlman's later works. The founders of Beat poetry held communal readings of Spengler's *Decline of the West*, and most of them have been considered leftists.

This cross pollination of leftist and rightist views is incredibly virulent these days. The journal *Telos* (through which Sunshine connects Zerzan to Alain de Benoist) began as an attempt to introduce the high theory of Western Marxism and The Frankfurt School (such as Adorno) to the American New Left.

Telos is open to publishing the anti-postmodern work of Zerzan and the postmodern work of, say, Jean Baudrillard. They have also republished books by German "conservative revolutionary" Ernst Jünger and Nazi legalist Carl Schmitt. Schmitt, unlike the other pseudo-fascists mentioned thus far, actually was a member of the NSDAP and after the war lectured throughout Francoist Spain.

Schmitt is best known today for being much loved by postmodern leftists like Antonio Negri, Slavoj Žižek, and especially Giorgio Agamben. Traces of Schmitt's influence can also be felt in the texts of France's *Tiqun* journal which are slowly being translated into English.

It is odd that Sunshine finds Heidegger's influence on Zerzan particularly damning considering the sheer amount of people influenced or inspired

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by him including: Hannah Arendt, a Jewish leftist and anti-totalitarian; Jean Luc-Nancy, a deconstructionist; Jean-Paul Sartre, the much loved existentialist and Marxist (who denied Stalin's purges, by the way); Simone de Beauvoir, the mother of French feminism; and New Rightist Alain de Benoist.

Jacques Camatte, who harshly criticized de Benoist, also believed that conservative institutions preserved something "real" and "human" in the midst of modern inhumanity, as did Nietzsche before de Benoist and Camatte. Nietzsche is perhaps the most influential philosopher of modern times and was formally seen as the prototypical proto-fascist.

I mean, anyone can be maligned or made to look suspicious through this "guilt by association." Is not Adorno connected to Stalin via Marx? Post-structuralism is all about accepting the multifarious perspectives that exist, right?

Leftists and postmodernists have been influenced by rightist thinkers (and vice versa) for decades. The acceptance of every potential perspective as legitimate is the greatest strength and greatest weakness of the postmodern epoch.

Alaric Malgrath
London, Ontario

SUNSHINE REPLIES TO ALARIC MALGRATH & DAN TODD

Both Alaric Malgrath and Dan Todd seem to have misunderstood my argument, and both attribute views to me which I do not hold.

Today, there is a high level of cross-over between far Left and far Right movements. German neo-Nazis proclaim that they are "Autonomist Nationalists" and march in huge Black Blocs, while white separatists in the US and Australia have rechristened themselves "National-Anarchists" and joined anti-globalization and anti-Israel demonstrations. Meanwhile, Zerzan has attracted attention from the same fascist

websites and journals that are part of this milieu.

For example, Zerzan's *Running on Emptiness* was reviewed in a pagan-fascist journal a few years ago. In it, Zerzan was praised for rejecting civilization and progress ("in this regard he has more in common with voices from the so-called extreme right"), and favorably compared to racist and fascist thinkers with similar views, such as Pentti Linkola and Julius Evola. Regarding Evola, the reviewer says "the two writers are not dissimilar in the forcefulness of their critique against the modern world and their wish to shatter its very foundations, in order that something more noble might be recovered."

As I specified in my review, it is precisely this interest in Zerzan coming from the fascist milieu itself which is so disturbing.

My review specified that there are five overlapping circumstances which have created a problematic situation:

1. Zerzan's references to fascist and proto-fascist authors are increasing in frequency compared to his older works.

2. Zerzan publishes in a journal which also prints a neo-fascist author. (What *Telos* was 30 years ago is different from who they are now; in 2006, both Benoist and Zerzan published articles in the journal.)

3. Zerzan's conceptual schema is structurally parallel to fascism's, and certain theorists—specifically Theodor Adorno—have identified this structure as having intrinsic fascist properties.

4. Zerzan has failed to distinguish why his views are fundamentally different from, and incompatible with, fascism. This is different from thinkers such as Adorno, who also praised Spengler (see "Spengler After the Decline" in *Prisms*), but made sure to distinguish why their theories were different.

5. Most importantly, all this has occurred in a context of fascists expressing their interest in Zerzan and praising his works.

Malgrath pretends that I only mention the second (and maybe the third) condition, and therefore am engaging

in "guilt by association". Malgrath mentions Negri, Žižek, Camatte and Agamben as radicals who are also influenced by fascist or proto-fascist writers. But this changes nothing.

If their work structurally paralleled fascist philosophy, if they were publishing in journals alongside fascists, and—most importantly—if fascists were also openly praising them, I would challenge all of them to do the same thing I have asked of Zerzan: to philosophically separate their works from fascism and show why they are incompatible.

This is what Adorno himself did, and this is the same as I am doing with Zerzan—encouraging him to place his own works beyond recuperation by neo-fascists.

Lastly, Malgrath says that "Post-structuralism is all about accepting the multifarious perspectives that exist, right?" and that the "acceptance of every potential perspective as legitimate is the greatest strength and greatest weakness of the postmodern epoch." I am not a post-structuralist (nor was Adorno), and the argument I am making here runs counter to how Malgrath is characterizing post-structuralism.

A true "post-modernist" view would accept this narrative (i.e., the redemption of the unmediated self from a corrupt modernity) as completely equal to any other. Against this, and following Adorno, I am suggesting that this kind of narrative has intrinsic problems; it is not just another, equally "legitimate" perspective.

On the other hand, Todd's letter portrays me as some sort of atavistic Social Democrat who believes in the historic role of the working class and the sanctity of property. First, there is a difference between discussing mediation in modern society as such and proclaiming that humans can return to a fully unmediated state, outside of language.

Second, it is the Left itself (as I understand it; Todd does not define who is part of this Left) that denounces Property. In fact, archetypal Leftist Karl Marx criticized J.-P. Proudhon

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New Adventures in Criminalizing Dissent: Feds Target Tortuga House & Midwest Activists

BY SHLOMO BROOKLYN

The federal government's continuing campaign to prosecute eco-saboteurs as terrorists has not stopped it from also trying to imprison other radicals on outlandish charges. In particular, it continues to expand its powers to criminalize what has in the past been legal activism.

A recent target is the anarchist New York City household Tortuga, a uniquely long-standing anarchist residence in city, and definitely the only one in Jackson Heights, Queens, proudly flying a red-and-black flag in front!

The numerous people who live there have been politically active for decades. One of the better-known projects to come out of the house was the Curious George Brigades' book, *Anarchy in the Age of Dinosaurs*.

The current saga began on September 24 when two Tortuga residents, Michael Wallschlaege and Elliot Madison, were arrested in a Pittsburgh hotel room during protests against the G20 summit being held in that city. As part of the protest communications team, they were using Twitter to relay publicly available police scanner information to activists on the street. For doing this, they were charged with "hindering apprehension or prosecution, criminal use of a communication facility and possession of instruments of crime."

As many commentators pointed out, when Iranian activists in June used Twitter to organize opposition demonstrations, the US State Department intervened so that Twitter delayed its scheduled maintenance and stayed online. But when US activists did the same in Pittsburgh, they were arrested. One of them was released after posting an almost-unheard-of \$30,000 cash bond.

On October 1, back in New York, Tortuga house residents were awakened by a federal Joint Terrorism Task Force team using a battering ram to smash down their front door at 6am. Agents proceeded to kick in each (unlocked) bedroom door and searched its contents. As helicopters circled overhead, the house members sat in handcuffs while agents ransacked their home. Numerous items were seized from all house members—not just from Wallschlaege and Madison.

Agents didn't just take every single cell phone, data backup, and computer, they also seized stuffed animals and a needlepoint of Lenin made by the grandmother of one of the residents! (We can only assume it was the latter that caused



the trotskyst *Spartacist League* newspaper to express solidarity with Tortuga over the raids.) The seven house members went to court to have their items returned, but the judge refused.

On November 3, the charges against Wallschlaege and Madison were suddenly dropped. According to their support blog, the prosecution said pursuing the charges, "would be unwise" after consulting other law enforcement agencies, and because of other pending investigations.

The house raid was conducted on the basis of an obscure federal anti-rioting law (18 U.S.C. §2101). One of the few times this law has been used was in the Chicago 7 case, following the 1968 Democratic National Convention.

As of our press time, no charges are pending against Tortuga residents, but as the grand jury seeking to indict house members is still convened, it is perhaps only a matter of time before the government pursues more ridiculous charges against these activists.

For more information or to contribute to their defense fund, see: friendsoftortuga.wordpress.com

Also of note is the imprisonment of Carrie Feldman and Scott DeMuth, both of Minneapolis and affiliated with the prison support group EWOK! (Earth Warriors are Okay!). Subpoenaed by a 2009 Iowa grand jury investigating a 2004 Animal Liberation Front action, Feldman and DeMuth appeared on October 15 and November 17; both refused to testify and were jailed for contempt. Feldman is still in jail as of press time, but the state released DeMuth, only to charge him days later under the Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act.

DeMuth, a sociology student, says that one of the reasons he refused to testify is that information he possesses is part of university-based research, and that professional ethics prohibit him from revealing his sources. He has attracted support from a number of academics.

In some ways, his situation is even more egregious than many of the other Green Scare cases. In most of them, the State has turned sabotage into "terrorism." But with DeMuth, the State is charging him with terrorism for refusing to become a snitch!

For updates and to donate, see: davenportgrandjury.wordpress.com

FE

Reflections on Copenhagen & the Cycle of Movements, Ten Years After Seattle WTO

On November 30, 2009, the World Trade Organization (WTO) met in Geneva, ten years to the day of the shutdown of the WTO in the streets of Seattle, still reeling from a decade of global organizing and mobilizations against it. On that same day, November 30, 2009, President Obama announced orders to send 30,000 additional US troops to Afghanistan. Two weeks later, from December 7–18, the United Nations Copenhagen climate summit took place, paralleled by street mobilizations, mass direct actions, and counter-summits of global social movements.

I'm writing this in early 2010, in what feels like an unusual opening to re-think what is happening in the world and in our communities, and what we can do to bring about positive changes.

An emerging global and North American climate justice movement, rejecting market solutions and calling for nonviolent direct action, is emerging. The parallels between the global justice/anti-capitalist movement emerging from Seattle and the climate justice movement emerging from Copenhagen are striking. Many of the people with whom I organize local climate justice actions in the San Francisco Bay area are folks I was with in the streets of Seattle during the WTO and in the streets resisting the US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and are a new wave of young radicals. The value of looking back to Seattle WTO resistance is to think about what worked, why, what can be done better, and then to innovate and not fall into the trap of repeating.

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and governments, and powerful for people, communities, and movements.

ACTIVIST MYTHS AND CHALLENGES

After Seattle, Copenhagen or other successful mobilizations there is a tendency to look toward the next to big summit or mass action. Mass mobilizations and direct action are a key part of any successful movement, but strong mobilizations come out of ongoing campaigns and are the culmination of movement building in our communities. They are not a substitute for them.

There is an activist and radical myth that Seattle WTO resistance was largely a semi-spontaneous rebellion or that it depended mostly on an element of surprise, or even luck. This myth overlooks the facts of massive grassroots organizing, mobilizing, networking, education, alliance-building, media work, and creation of a unifying strategic framework. This is not to negate the less explainable elements, like emergent intelligence—people thinking along the same lines at the same time, nationally and globally—that took place in conjunction with the strong foundation of organizing and strategy. In some cases people have tried to repeat a Seattle WTO-type mobilization without the lead-time, capacity, or support. The result has been a series of less planned, narrowly framed, mass actions that have left participants vulnerable to getting beaten up politically, physically, and legally.

After mass action efforts in St. Paul during the 2008 Republican National Convention, veteran direct action organizer and strategist George Lakey wrote in a discussion letter titled “Let’s Support Winning Instead of Witness”:

My experience is that most of the militant young anarchists that go from place to place to hold their ritual bashes (and not all militant young anarchists do so) are as non-strategic and unconcerned with social change as are most pacifists who hold signs at the county courthouse every Wednesday at noon.

Direct action organizer Matthew Smucker gives some insight in his brilliant self-critical essay, “What Prevents Radicals from Acting Strategically?” He writes:

We need to examine how our groups’ collective rituals and alternative narratives, if unchecked by an imperative to strategically engage society, will tend toward self-isolation. We need to see how profoundly this limits the potential power of our movements. When protest tactics become primarily collective ritual without regard to a strategy for broader engagement, then much of the nonparticipating public is likely to associate the given issues with the particular ritual, or the “type” of people who perform the ritual. People who sympathize with the issue or goal may not become active in the cause because they are not interested in assimilating into—or being identified with—a fringe subculture, or because they see a lack of strategy.

Smucker expands on these ideas further:

One of the largest barriers to strategic thought and action in many U.S. social movements today is that, in the story of the righteous few, success itself is suspect. If a group or individual is embraced by a significant enough portion of society, it

must be because they are not truly revolutionary or because their message has been “watered down,” rather than because they’ve organized or communicated their message effectively.

Too many US anti-authoritarians and anti-capitalists, often courageous and smart activists, seem stuck with organizing practices that lead to self-marginalization, while millions of people in the US are hungry for change and would step up to common-sense, well-organized, strategic mass direct action-based campaigns around housing, work, healthcare, and climate, and against war.

AFTER-ACTION ANALYSIS

After the Seattle WTO protests many of us went full steam into the next round of organizing. We did not take the time out to analyze what had worked, what had not, and why. And now, a long and ongoing series of mass actions in the US is missing the lessons that hundreds of organizers could have provided. As radical researcher Paul de Armond writes in “Black Flag Over Seattle,” his excellent outsider analysis of the 1999 weeklong battle originally published in the *Albion Monitor*,

Law enforcement, government authorities, and even the American Civil Liberties Union have conducted instructive after-action analyses of the Battle of Seattle. By way of contrast, none of the protest organizations has rendered an after-action analysis of the strategies and tactics used in Seattle, even though the Internet teems with eyewitness accounts. In all forms of protracted conflict, early confrontations are seedbeds of doctrinal innovation—on all sides.

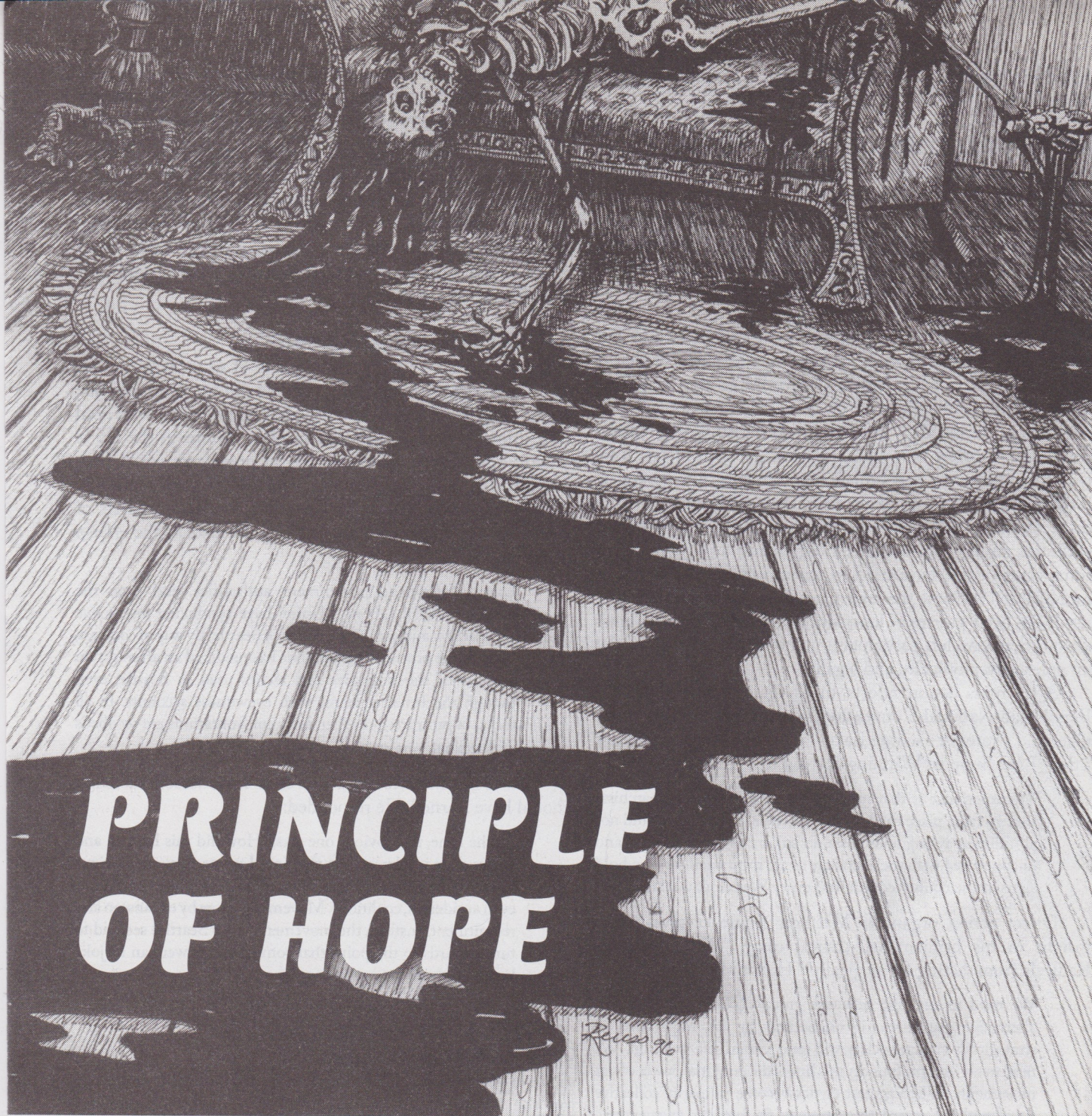
In a 2009 interview I asked him what lessons activists should have learned. He responded:

At the time, the obvious one was, “How did this happen and where does it take us?” At the time I wrote this, one obvious lesson to me seemed the unexpected political power of ad-hoc, even accidental, coalitions. Movements grow by expansion and recruitment. Instead, the movement [after Seattle] seemed to turn inwards to the point that some protests were an in-joke known only to the participants.

SEATTLE WTO SHUTDOWN STRATEGIC PRINCIPLES

Several years after the Seattle actions, a group of us reflected on the key elements or principles that made the one-day mass urban action in Seattle a success. These principles also apply to similar actions: the 2003 shutdown of San Francisco’s financial district the day after the US invasion of Iraq and, to some degree, the recent Reclaim Power mass action in Copenhagen. We came up with the following principles in an effort to develop a people-power strategy within the US anti-war movement. I have added a few more for the book, *The Battle of the Story of the Battle of Seattle*.

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PRINCIPLE OF HOPE

DON LACOSS

"Dr. Alfred Nobel, a man who became rich discovering new ways to kill more people faster than anyone ever before, died yesterday," declared one French newspaper obituary in 1888.

Nobel, a Swedish chemist, engineer, inventor, and munitions industrialist, had become obscenely wealthy producing and selling weapons all over the world. In addition to getting rich through his commercial activities as a shameless merchant of death, Nobel also owned hundreds of patents, the most lucrative of which was his 1867 process for weaponizing the

dangerously unstable explosive compound nitroglycerine into an easier-to-handle form that he called "dynamite."

He was also responsible for an innovative gunpowder concoction called ballistite, as well as gelignite, that favorite ingredient of car-bomb manufacturers everywhere.

The 1888 obituary announcing Nobel's death was eight years too soon. He was working in Paris at the time, and when the arms manufacturer read this and similar reports about his life and legacy, he realized that history would not treat him kindly once he actually did die.

So, in an effort to clean up his monstrously bloodstained reputation, Nobel rewrote his will to create an international foundation that would establish the five "Nobel Prizes" after his death with a portion of his fortune (more than \$250 million in today's money, which gives you the sense of the cash that could be made in the European arms trade during the Age of Imperialism).

In December 2009, mere days after formally announcing his plan to escalate and intensify the US war in Afghanistan by deploying 30,000 more troops in order to protect "vital national interests," US President Obama was declared the recipient of a Nobel Prize for Peace, an award supposedly given to the one person in the world who had "done the most or the best work for fraternity between nations, for the abolition or reduction of standing armies, and for the holding and promotion of peace congresses."

Obama now joins the ranks of other statist war-makers and empire-builders who have won the Peace Prize, such as Woodrow Wilson, Theodore Roosevelt, and Henry Kissinger.

"Let us reach for the world that ought to be," Obama said with a straight face at the award ceremony as thousands of anti-war protesters marched in Oslo and denounced the US President. "We can understand that there will be war and still strive for peace." But you cannot "reach for the world that ought to be" by resigning yourself to live only in the world that is.

Oblivious or apathetic to the horrors of neoliberal imperialism, Obama has gone ahead and re-entrenched the US war in Afghanistan at the cost of tens of billions of dollars and an untold number of lives for years to come. Obama's insistence on starting a "draw-down" of troops there in eighteen months is, of course, silly.

This escalation means a minimum of five more years of US war in Afghanistan, though many experts believe ten to twelve years to be far more likely. Moreover, the idea that the US could "win" this war is equally ridiculous. Afghanistan has been the graveyard of empires since Alexander the Great, and no army of a "superior civilization"—the Sassanid Persian Empire, the Mongol Empire, the British Empire, or the Soviet Union—has been able to successfully conquer and occupy a fiercely decentralized nation that is splintered by geography, regional loyalties, and ethnolinguistic identities.

In a conversation about the possibility of a civil war in Afghanistan between Pashtuns and Tajiks, a retired general who had been in charge of the Soviet counter-insurgency operations in Afghanistan for ten years explained it by quoting a bit of traditional Pashtun folk-wisdom: "It is me against all my brothers; me and my brothers against all our cousins; and me, my brothers, and my cousins against everyone else." Compounding all this is the cross-pollinating international hostilities in southwest Asia between Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Kashmir, and Iran.

In short, Obama's efforts to prop up Hamid Karzai's fabulously corrupt, completely inept, and widely discredited regime in order to "win" the war in Afghanistan equals the gross stupidity of Kennedy's and Johnson's commitment to strengthen the vicious Catholic police state of Ngo Dinh Diem all those years ago.

Given the brutality and horror of the Prize's financial origins, this award to Obama during the week he announced an escalation of hostilities in Afghanistan doesn't seem incongruous in the least, as it was only the most recent episode in the long history of how war is peace among the ruling classes.

But apparently there were many liberals who had supported the Obama presidency who saw this Peace Prize as an ugly irony or contradiction. These liberals stroked their left-over "Hope" and "Change" relics from a year ago and gnashed their teeth in disappointed anguish while others of their kind closed ranks and hysterically redoubled their loyalty to the President by loudly praising the man for his courageous, nuanced understanding of the war. I was accosted by one of these disappointed Obama fans recently, clearly distraught but still on the defensive. "Well," he snapped belligerently. "Aren't you going to tell me something sarcastic like 'I told you so?'"

I shook my head and shrugged. "So what are you going to do now? Break up with Obama?"

"Well, no!" he said emphatically. "How can I? I'm not going to vote for Sarah Palin in 2012—be realistic!"

And so there it is—Obama's "hope" in the simplest and most succinct of forms, a hope that is "realistic" in terms of limits established by what liberals see as their only alternative: political support for that insufferable Emma Bovary of Alaska.

The Nobel awards committee justified its decision to choose Obama for the Peace Prize by saying: "Only very rarely has a person to the same extent as Obama captured the world's attention and given its people hope for a better future." Recalling all those killed and maimed by Nobel's big business, it is no surprise, really, just how squalid and paltry the notion of hope is at his foundation.

There's a different sort of hope that needs to be mentioned here. Between 1938 and 1947, the apocalyptic German-Jewish Marxist writer Ernst Bloch created an encyclopedic three-volume philosophical meditation on libertarian utopian thought called *The Principle of Hope*.

Unlike the constricted and constipated "realism" of Obama's hope, Bloch's hope celebrates the fantastical realms of the past: poetry, fairy tales, daydreams, jokes, the passions released by music and movies, the reveries of tourists, the spaces of experimental architecture and speculative geography, and the impossible worlds of Renaissance alchemists and nineteenth-century utopian socialists. All of these things, Bloch argues, are efforts to escape that have been fundamental to the human mind for a long time.

The examples of utopian thinking past and present can be put to service in our daily struggle to emancipate ourselves from the miserabilist realities of a capitalist order that ruthlessly rationalizes, abstracts, reifies, alienates, and disenchanters in order to facilitate more profitable systems of merchandise production and consumption.

Bloch sees hope as the creative imaginings of a near-future world where people will live free from coercive and compulsory communities where we all are forced to dwell. It is the hope of resistance rather than Obama's hope of empire.

Ursula K. Le Guin: A Brief Biographical Sketch

PAUL J. COMEAU

In a writing career spanning nearly five decades, Ursula K. Le Guin has pushed the boundaries of fiction, transcending genre and style conventions to create a unique and distinctive literary voice. Her groundbreaking novels and stories have questioned gender constructions, challenging our notions about gender and identity, imagined an anarchist utopia, wrestled with ideas of free will and destiny, and subtly made commentary about race and race relations. At various times throughout her career critics have labeled Le Guin and her works feminist, anarchist, Taoist, and other labels, but they are both all of these and none of these things simultaneously. What is clearer than the labels of critics is her ability to think critically and turn that thought into finely wrought literature.

She was born in 1929 and raised in Berkley California. Her parents were the writer Theodora Kroeber, author of *Isbi in Two Worlds*, and the anthropologist Alfred L. Kroeber. She credits her inspiration for wanting to be a writer to learning to write at the age of five. Young Ursula attended public schools and on her website, she describes her childhood as “happy,”

My parents were loving, kind, and intelligent; I had an extra mother in my great-aunt; I had three big brothers to tag around after (and to have fights with the youngest of them); and everybody in the family was glad I was a girl, which made me able to be glad to be a woman, eventually.

Despite the Great Depression of the '30s, her family was well off thanks to her father's work as a university professor, and their Berkley home was a vibrant center for intellectual life.

There were lots of visitors, lots of talk and argument and discussion about everything, lots of books around, lots of music and story-telling. The life of the mind can be a very lively one. I was brought up to think and to question and to enjoy.

In this setting she pursued her interest in writing, with the understanding that as she approached college-age that she look to college as a tool to obtain a “a salable skill”—learning a trade that [she] could live on.” To this end, she attended Radcliffe College, earning her B.A. in 1951, and went on to study French and Italian Renaissance literature at Columbia University, earning her M.A. in 1952.

In 1953 she met and married historian Charles A. Le Guin in Paris, and together they moved to Portland, Oregon in 1958.

In 1966 Ace published her first novel, *Rocannon's World*, based on a 1964 short story first published in *Amazing Stories* and collected in *A Wind's Twelve Quarters* (Harper & Row 1975) with the title “Semley's Necklace.” A follow up set in



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the same universe, *Planet of Exile* (Ace) followed later that year, and a third novel, *City of Illusion* (Ace 1967) followed a year later. The three books mark the beginning of what some fans, critics, and publishers have dubbed the Hainish Cycle, or the Ekumen Saga, or series. Though Le Guin does not consider them part of a series because they do not “form a coherent history,” she admits that there are connections between the books. Tor books reissued the three novels in 1998 in one volume as *Worlds of Exile and Illusion*.

A Wizard of Earthsea, published by Parnassus/Houghton Mifflin in 1968, was the first book in what would become the Earthsea series in the '70s, and really is a series, meant to be read in the order written, because in Le Guin's words on her website, “it is all one story.” Before she would continue the Earthsea series in the '70s, though, Le Guin would write and in 1969 publish one of her most widely known and regarded works, *The Left Hand of Darkness* (Walker 1969, Ace 1969).

In *Left Hand*, Le Guin imagines the alien planet of Gethen/Winter, a world in which all the people are androgynes, capable of developing into either sex during the peak

of their sexual cycle, a period known as Kemmer. Gethen is a world without gender or socio-sexual roles, but it does hold to a strict code of social and political conduct—shifgrethor—to which all members of society are beholden. To this world comes Genly Ai, an emissary from the Ekumen, an alliance of human worlds who has come to Gethen to convince the world to join the Ekumen. Genly must confront not only his own gender biases, but navigate the complex code of shifgrethor, and the numerous layers of political intrigue that surround him. The novel was a masterpiece, and won both of science fiction's top awards for 1970, the Hugo and the Nebula awards, of which Harlan Ellison wrote in *Again Dangerous Visions*: "no award in that category [novel] in recent years has done the Nebula—or Hugo—more credit."

In the '70s Le Guin continued to write and publish at a furious pace, with a new novel nearly every year. She wrote two sequels to *A Wizard of Earthsea*, *The Tombs of Atuan* (Atheneum) in 1970 and *The Farthest Shore* (Atheneum) in 1972, creating one of the most celebrated and widely read fantasy trilogies since Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*. The year between the two Earthsea sequels, Le Guin published *The Lathe of Heaven* (Scribners 1971), an alternate-reality story neatly meshed with elements of Taoist philosophy.

In the middle of writing these three novels, the idea for a new story began germinating that tied into Le Guin's reading of all the pacifist-anarchist literature available in English at the time (See *Verbal Dance: an Interview with Ursula K. Le Guin* in this issue for more). This idea developed into perhaps her most well-known novel, *The Dispossessed* (Harper 1974), the story of a brilliant scientist at odds with his utopian anarchist society. The novel is one of the best, if not the best, fictional realization of an anarchist society as it might be practiced, and remains one of the most influential modern utopian novels written. *The Dispossessed* was awarded both the Hugo and Nebula awards for its year, making Le Guin the first author to win both awards twice for novels. Le Guin published several more novels and stories before decade's end, and her first book of essays, *The Language of the Night* (Putnam) in 1979.

Since the '70s Le Guin has continued to put out a constant stream of new material, from novels to poetry, translations, and books for children. In 1983, Harper published *The Eye of the Heron*, a novel about a society of pacifists inspired by the life and writings of Gandhi. *Always Coming Home* (Harper 1985), an experimental work mixing elements of narrative, anthropological study, poetry, songs, and art, to depict the culture and lifestyle of Kesh, a people living in the Pacific Northwest in a far distant future, followed.

In 1989, she published her second book of essays and criticism, *Dancing at the Edge of the World* (Grove), which included the essay, "A Non-Euclidean View of California as a Cold Place to Be," reprinted in this issue. That same year she published the children's book *Catwings* (Orchard), the first of four books in a series, all illustrated by J. Schindler.

In 1990 Le Guin returned to the world of Earthsea with *Tehanu*, the fourth of what would become six books in the Earthsea series, followed by *Tales from Earthsea* (Harcourt 2001), and *The Other Wind* (Harcourt 2003). She launched

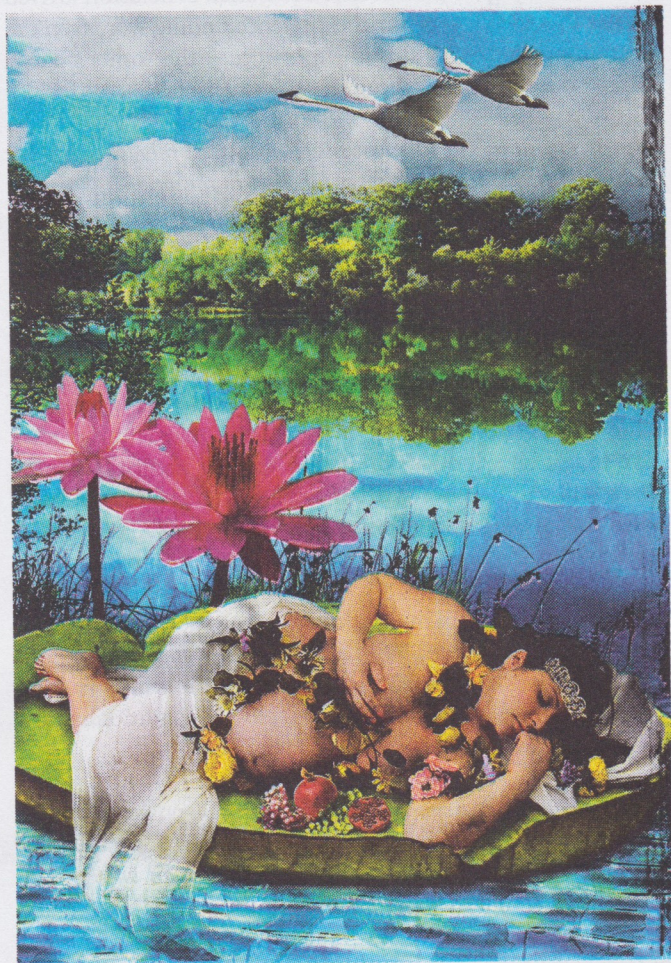
a new series, *Annals of the Western Shore*, with 2004's *Gifts* (Harcourt), followed by *Voices* (Harcourt 2006), and *Powers* (Harcourt 2007).

Her most recent novel is *Lavinia*, published by Harcourt in 2008. The title character of the novel is a minor character from Virgil's epic poem the Aeneid, who had no speaking lines in the poem. The novel won the 2009 Locus award for best fantasy novel, and the Mythopoeic Society nominated it for their 2009 Best Fantasy Novel award.

In addition to her awards for her novels *Lavinia*, *The Dispossessed*, and *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Le Guin has won countless awards for her works, including multiple Hugo and Nebula awards for her short stories, multiple Tiptree awards, and the 1991 Pushcart Prize for her story "Bill Weisler." In 2003, the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America awarded her the title Grand Master for lifetime achievement, and in 2004 she was the recipient of the Margaret A. Edwards Award honoring her lifetime contribution to young adult readers.

She still lives and writes in Oregon with her husband Charles, and they have three adult children and four grandchildren.

For more about Le Guin's life and work, check out her website: <http://www.ursulakleaguin.com>. **FE**



VERBAL DANCE: AN INTERVIEW WITH URSULA K. LE GUIN

PAUL J. COMEAU

In this interview conducted with *Fifth Estate* via email, Le Guin discusses influences on her life and work, some of the ideas behind her famous novel *The Dispossessed*, what needs to be done to cause a shift in the perception of anarchism in the popular imagination, and the inspirations for her most recent novel *Lavinia* (Harcourt 2008).

In The Dispossessed, the philosopher Odo states "True voyage is return." How did this statement relate to your life at the time you wrote it, and how does it relate to your life today?

I don't know. Obviously my writing comes out of my life, and I try to be honest to my perceptions of life, but I don't write to "express myself." My fiction is experiential but not confessional. To tell you the truth I seldom have any idea of how what I say in my books "relates" to me personally. A statement like "True voyage is return" isn't a reasoned conclusion arrived at after thought. It's unverbally experienced finding words, on the assumption that it's a shared experience—that other people, reading the words, may recognize the experience.

There is a point in The Dispossessed where the protagonist Shevek realizes or accepts that his "proper function in the social organism" is to "unbuild walls." To what extent has your career as a writer been a similar effort to "unbuild walls?"

Well, I have done some of that. Some of it purely within literature (trying to get critics and profs to stop ghettoizing genre literature, particularly s.f. and fantasy) and some of it with larger social intent, such as having most of my protagonists people of color, without saying much about it—so that white readers have to put on a brown skin if they want to identify with my characters. And I have written some fairly direct satirical or polemical stories about misogyny, homophobia, doctrinaire oppression and persecution, etc. That's all wall-unbuilding.

My metaphor for it in my work is "keeping the doors and windows open." The house I build in a story has walls, or it wouldn't be a house; but the doors aren't locked and the windows aren't blinded. I build very drafty houses. No air conditioning, the wind blows through.

In a previous interview, you described The Dispossessed as "an Anarchist utopian novel. Its ideas come from the pacifist anarchist tradition—Kropotkin, etc." Could you expand a bit on the background/ideas/inspirations for the novel?

That would take me hours and hours to answer. It was two years of reading. I read every anarchist book that was available in Portland in the early 1970s. That was plenty—there are several university libraries, and there was an anarchist bookstore, which had texts that are now easily available, but weren't at that time.

At this distance, I'd say that probably the major influences on me were Kropotkin, and the Goodmans, especially "Communitas."

Was the Shantih Town culture in The Eye of the Heron inspired by similar background material/ideas?

Yup. But more especially by Gandhi.

When did you first encounter anarchism? What drew you to it?

I had the germ of the story in my head but couldn't figure out who my protagonist, this physicist, was—I only knew he was somehow at odds with his society. I got to reading utopias, I read all the utopias, and that led me to Gandhi. Meanwhile biologists' discussion of altruism vs. selfish behavior had led me to Kropotkin's animal studies, and that drew me on to read more Kropotkin. So then I got fascinated by the whole pacifist-anarchist literature and just plunged in. And at some point it occurred to me: a) there has never been an anarchist utopian novel; b) THIS is what my physicist guy is all about! So there came *The Dispossessed*.

How has anarchism, as it relates to your own life, grown or changed over time?

I don't know. I can't live an anarchist life, and never could pretend to; when I was reading anarchism and in love with it, I was a middle-aged, middle-class housewife with three kids—and no desire to be anything else, so long as I could write my books.

So how does anarchism relate to my life? Only as freedom of the mind, of the imagination. The same freedom that reading Lao Tzu gave me many years earlier.

The Dispossessed is frequently included in anarchist suggested reading lists. If you were to write your own suggested reading list, what are some things that you would include in it?

I'm sorry—I'm really too far away from the literature I knew well decades ago. If I try to name names I'll just leave out half the most important ones. And there's undoubtedly some new ones I don't even know.

While in my mind, The Dispossessed is the best depiction of an anarchistic society "in practice," the popular imagination still depicts anarchists as brick and bomb throwers. What do you think needs to be done to cause a shift in perception of anarchism in the popular imagination?

If people who don't throw bricks and don't throw bombs, and don't dress in a deliberately unusual way, and don't aggressively question or attack other people's ideas, still identify themselves, plain and clear, as anarchists, that can start the shift... Just as, very, very slowly, the popular perception of feminists as a few bra-burning manhaters has had to shift and shrink, since ordinary women, wives, mothers, grandmothers, are willing to identify themselves as feminists. But oh, it is so slow, it takes so long!

My heart always used to sink when a certain small group of self-identified anarchists would join one of the anti-war or anti-homophobia demos in Portland. They were in-your-face aggressive, self-righteous, and would not accept the will of the majority of demonstrators in such matters as not deliberately annoying the police and begging for retaliation. They were always the ones that got their pictures in the newspaper, though, because they played into the negative stereotype.

We are up against something a bit new: the reactionary-right-religious media. When liberal has become a word at which children are taught to shudder, how ya gonna make anarchism acceptable?

You have discussed elsewhere the ongoing process for you of learning to write like a woman. You even described the male narrator of The Left Hand of Darkness as "a deliberate authorial outreach to male readers who (or so I thought at the time) would reject an androgynous central character, particularly in a book by a woman." Could you explain what it means to "write like a woman?"

I'm afraid I can't, because every woman writes like a woman in her own way—we are actually more various and less predictable, I think, in several respects, than male writers.

I would briefly describe my own major steps in the process as:

1. Read Virginia Woolf
2. Read the New Feminist writers of the '60s, '70s and after
3. Read poetry and fiction by women
4. Think about why I thought I had to write the way men write and about what men write about
5. Think hard: if I don't do that, then what do I write about?
6. Reread Virginia Woolf
7. Give it a try
8. Hey! It works!

Suppose hypothetically you were writing The Left Hand of Darkness today, what would be different about it compared to the novel you wrote 40 years ago?

Well, obviously, I'd have the benefit of forty years of other people's thinking about and questioning gender construction—which wasn't even a word when I wrote the book. That would be a climate so different from the almost total absence of such thought and discussion when I wrote the book that I can't even imagine the situation. Why would I write such a book now? What matters was writing it THEN.

In the introduction to the 1976 reprint of The Left Hand of Darkness, you say that "truth is a matter of the imagination." This reminds me of two statements Kurt Vonnegut made in Cat's Cradle where he says: "Nothing in this book is true" and later says "All of the true things I am about to tell you are shameless lies." Is fiction, or all art really, telling truth in the shape of pleasing lies?

I'll buy that. Not that the lies are always pleasing or the truth always true. Borges has even more interesting things to say on this subject than Vonnegut.

In your most recent novel Lavinia, the title character is a minor character from Virgil's epic poem the Aeneid, who has no speaking lines in the poem. Can you talk a bit about the experience of creating a voice for this character? Is it true that you learned Latin to read Virgil in his original language?

Lavinia began "talking" to me before I actually finished my very, very slow reading of the *Aeneid*—I mean, I began thinking about her: who was she? What did she think about having to marry this foreigner? What was her life like, a king's daughter in the Bronze Age in that part of Italy? She did what characters of novels do when they start coming to life in your mind. She was just there all the time. (Shevek, of *The Dispossessed*, was in my mind silently for about three years, waiting.) As soon as I asked Lavinia to tell me about herself, she started right in, in her own voice—hence the first-person narrative. I just listened and wrote it down. (Well, OK, I did some background stuff too.)

Latin—I had some in junior high, and again in grad school, but not enough to read Virgil, who isn't simple. I really did want to read him in Latin; you can tell that he's one of those poets that you really have to read in his own language. In my seventies, it was clearly now or never. So I got out my old grammars and memorized all those damn declensions and conjugations all over again. It was worth it.

Thanks for the tango,

all best,

Ursula

Introduction to "A Non-Euclidean View of California as a Cold Place To Be"



JOHN CLARK

Ursula Le Guin's works typically recount the story of a voyage. Whether or not this voyage traverses vast distances of space, it is always an epic journey of the spirit. It is a kind of vision quest in which we who allow ourselves to be taken along confront the strange, the alien, the other, only to return with a deeper understanding of ourselves. We gain a better sense of *who* we are, but as is perhaps more crucial, we gain insight into *where* we are. In the end, the voyage is a journey home.

What we learn from those distant others we meet on the journey is not that we should try to be like them, but that we are capable of being, in a much deeper and more complex way, like ourselves; not that we should recycle their way of life as our lifestyle but that by confronting a mode of existence that is rooted in place and experienced as home, we can develop a profound appreciation of our own place, our own home.

Home in its deepest sense is that place we know most intimately and many-sidedly. This is also what home once meant for everyone. As Le Guin points out in "A Non-Euclidean View," for primal people each detail of nature and of place was "better known to human beings than it has ever been since." The history of civilization is thus a history of forgetting—a loss of consciousness of what is closest to us and what has been most sacred to us. Le Guin poses the question of whether our voyage to the elsewhere of the past or the nowhere of fiction can lead us to regain certain lost qualities of mind and abandoned sensibilities, so that we may be once again able to experience reality more intensely, and

care about it more passionately, as it manifests itself precisely where we are.

Le Guin's epic voyage reveals the foolishness of our arrogant attempts to control and dominate a vast and mysterious universe, and of our futile efforts to capture and harness the infinite and the sublime through our simplistic, manipulative categories. This is the reason why Coyote turns up so frequently along the way. Lewis Hyde echoes Le Guin's point in his wonderful book on Coyote and the other Trickster figures, which, he says, reveal "no higher law, no hidden truth, but rather the plenitude and complexity of this world."¹ Coyote discloses what's right before our eyes—and, of course, our propensity to miss it completely.

The distinction between "hot" and "cold" societies that Le Guin borrows from Lévi-Strauss will probably startle most readers. It seems a bit strange to think about the British spreading hot Anglo-Saxon culture to frigid places like Polynesia. But as Le Guin explains, this is really a distinction between societies that are suitably warm, like healthy living organisms, and others that are dangerously overheated, like broken machines running out of control. "Coldness" is a quality much like Spinoza's *conatus*, the natural tendency of a living being to "persevere in its own existence." For millennia all societies were "cold" in this sense and lived in a quite normal, organic way. It must have seemed unimaginable to them that human beings could ever do otherwise.

Then came the emergence of "hot" societies and everything changed. "Life out of balance" became the reality principle.

Before long the Taoist philosophers were looking back longingly to the mythical reign of the Yellow Emperor, when no one had to talk about virtue or propriety because all did quite naturally what was best for all. Thus, utopia was born out of the malady of civilization and the memory of what came before. One of the greatest of these sages, Lao Tsu, wrote of a once and future world in which people could find all that they needed "without venturing far from home."

"Home" in this sense is the generous and bountiful community, a place of simple but abundant treasures. This ideal underlies Le Guin's citation of the perhaps disquieting, perhaps inspiring question: "What if I believe that Arlington, Texas, is utopia?" Surrealists have always stressed that "the wondrous" (*le merveilleux*) is all around us in everyday life if we are susceptible to its power. Similarly, Le Guin reminds us that the most radically utopian *possibilities* are already *realities*. She says of utopia "that if it is to come, it must exist already." It must exist where we are.

There are certain works of fiction that give you the feeling, "This is more real than ninety-nine percent of what I see around me!" The reason they produce this reaction is not that they help us escape from reality, but rather that they focus our attention on that small part of our world that we experience as eminently real; indeed, more than real. They point us toward that remnant of something greater, that "almost nothing" that we somehow know could "be all." Heraclitus said that we should expect the unexpected—the extraordinary in the midst of the ordinary—or else we won't find it. Such works help us find the unexpectedly wondrous at the heart of the ordinary.² In the end we discover, as Hakuin Zenji expresses it in the chat *Zazen-Wasan*, "This earth where we stand is the Pure Lotus Land, and this very body, the body of Buddha!"

Le Guin points out in "A Non-Euclidean View" that this wondrous aspect of reality is closely related to wildness. She reminds us that the wild (also called the Tao, the way or path of nature) is a force greater than we and all that we have created, and that its traces are all around us even in the most domesticated and pacified landscapes. As she states it, "the wild oats and poppies still come up pure gold in cracks in the cement that we have poured over utopia." This recalls Thoreau's famous statement that "in wildness [not only in 'wilderness'] is the preservation of the world." The wildness remains, even where wilderness has been gone for centuries or millennia. It is always here, in the wild oats that continue to grow, the wild children who continue to be born, the wild culture that proliferates despite all the efforts of the state and capitalism, the wild, creative mind that haunts our dreams, even when it is banished from waking life.

Le Guin takes us on a voyage along the path where the wildness of dreams meets the wildness of the world. **FE**

¹Lewis Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998), p. 289.

²Le Guin's *Always Coming Home* is such a work *par excellence*. Robert Nichols' *Daily Lives of Nghsi Altai*, which Le Guin recommends so highly, is another good example, as is, more recently, Starhawk's *The Fifth Sacred Thing*.

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A NON-EUCLIDEAN VIEW OF CALIFORNIA AS A COLD PLACE TO BE (1982)

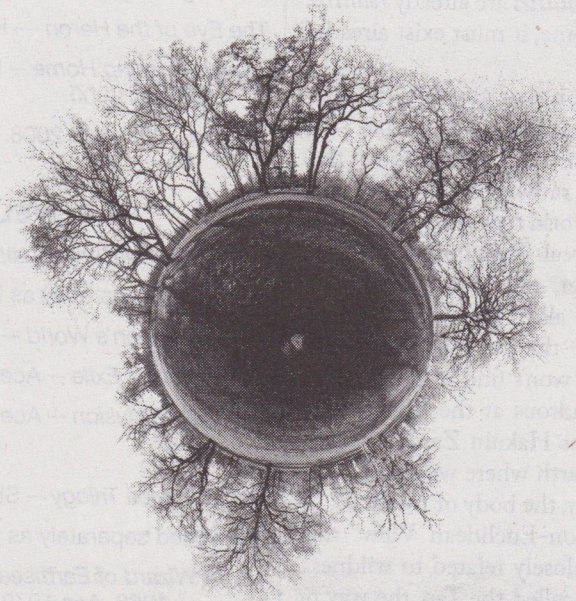
URSULA K. LE GUIN

Robert C. Elliott died in 1981 in the very noon of his scholarship, just after completing his book *The Literary Persona*. He was the truest of teachers, the kindest of friends. This paper was prepared to be read as the first in a series of lectures at his college of the University of California, San Diego, honoring his memory.

We use the French word *lecture*, "reading," to mean reading and speaking aloud, a performance; the French call such a performance not a *lecture* but a *conference*. The distinction is interesting. Reading is a silent collaboration of reader and writer, apart; lecturing, a noisy collaboration of lecturer and audience, together. The peculiar patchwork form of this paper is my attempt to make it a "conference," a performable work, a piece for voices. The time and place, a warm April night in La Jolla in 1982, are past, and the warm and noisy audience must be replaced by the gentle reader; but the first voice is still that of Bob Elliot.

In *The Shape of Utopia*, speaking of our modern distrust of utopia, he said,

If the word is to be redeemed, it will have to be by someone who has followed utopia into the abyss which yawns behind the Grand Inquisitor's vision, and who then has clambered out on the other side.¹



That is my starting point, that startling image; and my motto is:

Usà puyew usu wapiw!

We shall be returning to both, never fear; what I am about here is returning.

In the first chapter of *The Shape of Utopia*, Bob points out that in the great participatory festivals such as Saturnalia, Mardi Gras, or Christmas, the

age of peace and equality, the Golden Age, may be lived in an interval set apart for it, a time outside of daily time. But to bring perfect *communitas* into the structure of ordinary society would be a job only Zeus could handle; or, "if one does not believe in Zeus's good will, or even in his existence," says Bob, it becomes a job for the mind of man.

Utopia is the application of man's reason and his will to the myth [of the Golden Age], man's effort to work out imaginatively what happens—or might happen—when the primal longings embodied in the myth confront the principle of reality. In this effort man no longer merely dreams of a divine state in some remote time: he assumes the role of creator.²

Now, the Golden Age, or Dream Time, is remote only from the rational mind. It is not accessible to euclidean reason; but on the evidence of all myth and mysticism, and the assurance of every participatory religion, it is, to those with the gift or discipline to perceive it, right here, right now. Whereas it is of the very essence of the rational or Jovian utopia that it is *not*

¹"A Non-Euclidean View of California As A Cold Place to Be" from *Dancing at the Edge of the World* by Ursula K. Le Guin.
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here and *not* now. It is made by the reaction of will and reason against, away from, the here-and-now, and it is, as More said in naming it, nowhere. It is pure structure without content; pure model; goal. That is its virtue. Utopia is uninhabitable. As soon as we reach it, it ceases to be utopia. As evidence of this sad but ineluctable fact, may I point out that we in this room, here and now, are inhabiting utopia.

I was told as a child, and like to believe, that California was named "The Golden State" not just for the stuff Sutter found but for the wild poppies on its hills and the wild oats of summer. To the Spanish and Mexicans I gather it was the boondocks; but to the Anglos it has been a true utopia: the Golden Age made accessible by willpower, the wild paradise to be tamed by reason; the place where you go free of the old bonds and cramps, leaving behind your farm and your galoshes, casting aside your rheumatism and your inhibitions, taking up a new "life style" in a not-here-not-now where everybody gets rich quick in the movies or finds the meaning of life or anyhow gets a good tan hang-gliding. And the wild oats and poppies still come up pure gold in cracks in the cement that we have poured over utopia.

In "assuming the role of creator," we seek what Lao Tzu calls "the profit of what is not," rather than participating in what is. To reconstruct the world, to rebuild or rationalize it, is to run the risk of losing or destroying what in fact is.

After all, California was not empty when the Anglos came. Despite the efforts of the missionaries, it was still the most heavily populated region in North America.

What the Whites perceived as a wilderness to be "tamed" was in fact better known to human beings than it has ever been since: known and named. Every hill, every valley, creek, canyon, gulch, gully, draw, point, cliff, bluff, beach, bend, good-sized boulder, and tree of any character had its name, its place in the order of things. An order was perceived, of which the invaders were entirely ignorant. Each of those names named, not a goal, not a place to get to, but a place where one is: a center of the world. There were centers of the world all over California. One of them is a bluff on the Klamath River. Its name was Katimin. The bluff is still there, but it has no name, and the center of the world is not there. The six directions can meet only in lived time, in the place people call home, the seventh direction, the center.

But we leave home, shouting *Avanti!* and *Westward Ho!*, driven by our godlike reason, which chafes at the limited, intractable, unreasonable present, and yearns to free itself from the fetters of the past.

"People are always shouting they want to create a better future," says Milan Kundera, in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*

It's not true. The future is an apathetic void of no interest to anyone. The past is full of life, eager to irritate us, provoke and insult us, tempt us to destroy or repaint it. The only reason people want to be masters of the future is to change the

past.³

And at the end of the book he talks to the interviewer about forgetting: forgetting is

The great private problem of man: death as the loss of the self. But what is this self? It is the sum of everything we remember. Thus, what terrifies us about death is not the loss of the future but the loss of the past.⁴

And so, Kundera says, when a big power wants to deprive a smaller one of its national identity, of its self-consciousness, it uses what he calls the "method of organized forgetting."

And when a future-oriented culture impinges upon a present-centered one, the method becomes a compulsion. Things are forgotten wholesale. What are the names "Costanoan," "Wappo"? They are what the Spanish called the people around the Bay Area and in the Napa Valley, but what those people called themselves we do not know: the names were forgotten

even before the people were wiped out. There was no past. *Tabula rasa.*

One of our finest methods of organized forgetting is called discovery. Julius Caesar exemplifies the technique with characteristic elegance in his *Gallie Wars*. "It was not certain that Britain existed," he says, "until I went there."

To whom was it not certain? But what the heathen know doesn't count. Only if godlike Caesar sees it can Britannia rule the waves.

Only if a European discovered or invented it could America exist. At least Columbus had the wit, in his madness, to mistake Venezuela for the outskirts of Paradise. But he remarked on the availability of cheap slave labor in Paradise.

The first chapter of *California: An Interpretive History*, by Professor Walton Bean, contains this paragraph:

The survival of a Stone Age culture in California was not the result of any hereditary biological limitations on the potential of the Indians as a "race." They had been geographically and culturally isolated. The vast expanse of oceans, mountains, and deserts had sheltered California from foreign stimulation as well as from foreign conquest...

(being isolated from contact and protected from conquest are, you will have noticed, characteristics of utopia),

...and even within California the Indian groups were so settled that they had little contact with each other. On the positive side, there was something to be said for their culture just as it was. ... The California Indians had made a successful adaptation to their environment and they had learned to live without destroying each other.⁵

Professor Bean's excellent book is superior to many of its kind in the area of my particular interest: the first chapter. Chapter One of the American history—South or North America, national or regional—is usually short. Unusually short. In it, the "tribes" that "occupied" the area are mentioned and perhaps

anecdotally described. In Chapter Two, a European "discovers" the area; and with a gasp of relief the historian plunges into a narration of the conquest, often referred to as settlement or colonization, and the acts of the conquerors. Since history has traditionally been defined by historians as the written record, this imbalance is inevitable. And in a larger sense it is legitimate; for the non-urban peoples of the Americas had no history, properly speaking, and therefore are visible only to the anthropologist, not to the historian, except as they entered into White history.

The imbalance is unavoidable, legitimate, and also, I believe, very dangerous. It expresses too conveniently the conquerors' wish to deny the value of the cultures they destroyed, and dehumanize the people they killed. It partakes too much of the method of organized forgetting. To call this "the New World"—there's a Caesarian birth!

The words "holocaust" and "genocide" are fashionable now; but not often are they applied to American history. We were not told in school in Berkeley that the history of California had the final solution for its first chapter. We were told that the Indians "gave way" before the "march of progress."

In the introduction to *The Wishing Bone Cycle*, Howard A. Norman says:

The Swampy Cree have a conceptual term which I've heard used to describe the thinking of a porcupine as he backs into a rock crevice:

Usà puyew usu wapiw.

"He goes backward, looks forward." The porcupine consciously goes backward in order to speculate safely on the future, allowing him to look out at his enemy or the new day. To the Cree, it's an instructive act of self-preservation.⁶

The opening formula for a Cree story is "an invitation to listen, followed by the phrase, 'I go backward, look forward, as the porcupine does.'"⁷

In order to speculate safely on an inhabitable future, perhaps we would do well to find a rock crevice and go backward. In order to find our roots, perhaps we should look for them where roots are usually found. At least the Spirit of Place is a more benign one than the exclusive and aggressive Spirit of Race, the mysticism of blood that has cost so much blood. With all our self-consciousness, we have very little sense of where we live, where we are right here right now. If we did, we wouldn't muck it up the way we do. If we did, our literature would celebrate it. If we did, our religion might be participatory. If we did—if we really lived here, now, in this present—we might have some sense of our future as a people. We might know where the center of the world is.

...Ideally, at its loftiest and most pure, the utopia aspires to (if it has never reached) the condition of the idyll as Schiller describes it—that mode of poetry which would lead man, not back to Arcadia, but forward to Elysium, to a state of society in which man would be at peace with himself and the external world.⁸

The California Indians had made a successful adaptation

to their environment and they had learned to live without destroying each other.⁹

It was Arcadia, of course; it was not Elysium. I heed Victor Turner's warning not to confuse archaic or primitive societies with the true *communitas*, "which is a dimension of all societies, past and present."¹⁰ I am not proposing a return to the Stone Age. My intent is not reactionary, nor even conservative, but simply subversive. It seems that the utopian imagination is trapped, like capitalism and industrialism and the human population, in a one-way future consisting only of growth. All I'm trying to do is figure how to put a pig on the tracks.

Go backward. Turn and return.

If the word [utopia] is to be redeemed, it will have to be by someone who has followed utopia into the abyss which yawns behind the Grand Inquisitor's vision.¹¹

The utopia of the Grand Inquisitor

is the product of "the euclidean mind" (a phrase Dostoyevsky often used), which is obsessed by the idea of regulating all life by reason and bringing happiness to man whatever the cost.¹²

The single vision of the Grand Inquisitor perceives the condition of man in a way stated with awful clarity by Yevgeny Zamyatin, in *We*:

There were two in paradise, and the choice was offered to them: happiness without freedom, or freedom without happiness. No other choice.¹³

No other choice. Hear now the voice of Urizen!

Hidden, set apart in my stern counsels
Reserved for days of futurity,
I have sought for a joy without pain,
For a solid without fluctuation...

Lo, I unfold my darkness and on
This rock place with strong hand the book
Of eternal brass, written in my solitude.

Laws of peace, of love, of unity,
Of pity, compassion, forgiveness.
Let each choose one habitation,
His ancient infinite mansion,
One command, one joy, one desire,
One curse, one weight, one measure,
One King, one God, one Law.¹⁴

In order to believe in utopia, Bob Elliot said, we must believe

that through the exercise of their reason men can control and in major ways alter for the better their social environment... One must have faith of a kind that our history has made nearly inaccessible.¹⁵

"When the Way is lost," Lao Tzu observed in a rather similar historical situation a few thousand years earlier,

there is benevolence. When benevolence is lost there is justice. When justice is lost there are the rites. The rites are the end of loyalty and good faith, the beginning of disorder.¹⁶

"Prisons," said William Blake, "are built with stones of Law."¹⁷ And coming back round to the Grand Inquisitor, we have Milan Kundera restating the dilemma of Happiness versus Freedom:

Totalitarianism is not only hell, but also the dream of paradise—the age-old dream of a world where everybody would live in harmony, united by a single common will and faith, without secrets from one another. ... If totalitarianism did not exploit these archetypes, which are deep inside us all and rooted deep in all religions, it could never attract so many people, especially during the early phases of its existence. Once the dream of paradise starts to turn into reality, however, here and there people begin to crop up who stand in its way, and so the rulers of paradise must build a little gulag on the side of Eden. In the course of time this gulag grows ever bigger and more perfect, while the adjoining paradise gets ever smaller and poorer.¹⁸

The purer, the more euclidean the reason that builds a utopia, the greater is its self-destructive capacity. I submit that our lack of faith in the benevolence of reason as the controlling power is well founded. We must test and trust our reason, but to have *faith* in it is to elevate it to godhead. Zeus the Creator takes over. Unruly Titans are sent to the salt mines, and inconvenient Prometheus to the reservation. Earth itself comes to be the wart on the walls of Eden.

The rationalist utopia is a power trip. It is a montheocracy, declared by executive decree, and maintained by willpower; as its premise is progress, not process, it has no habitable present, and speaks only in the future tense. And in the end reason itself must reject it.

"O that I had never drank the wine nor eat the bread
Of dark mortality, nor cast my view into futurity, nor turned
My back darkening the present, clouding with a cloud,
And building arches high and cities, turrets and towers
and domes
Whose smoke destroyed the pleasant garden, and
whose running kennels
Choked the bright rivers....

Then go, O dark futurity! I will cast thee forth from these
Heavens of my brain, nor will I look upon futurity more.
I cast futurity away, and turn my back upon that void
Which I have made, for lo! futurity is in this moment...."

So Urizen spoke....

Then, glorious bright, exulting in his joy,
He sounding rose into the heavens, in naked majesty,
In radiant youth....¹⁹

That is certainly the high point of this paper. I wish we could follow Urizen in his splendid vertical jailbreak, but it is a route reserved to the major poets and composers. The rest of us must stay down here on the ground, walking in circles, proposing devious side trips, and asking impertinent questions. My question now is: Where is the place Coyote made?

In a paper about teaching utopia, Professor Kenneth Roemer says:

The importance of this question was forced upon me several years ago in a freshman comp course at the University of Texas at Arlington. I asked the class to write a paper in response to a hypothetical situation: if you had unlimited financial resources and total local, state, and national support, how would you transform Arlington, Texas, into utopia? A few minutes after the class had begun to write, one of the students—a mature and intelligent woman in her late thirties—approached my desk. She seemed embarrassed, even upset. She asked, "What if I believe that Arlington, Texas, is utopia?"²⁰

What do you do with *her* in Walden Two?

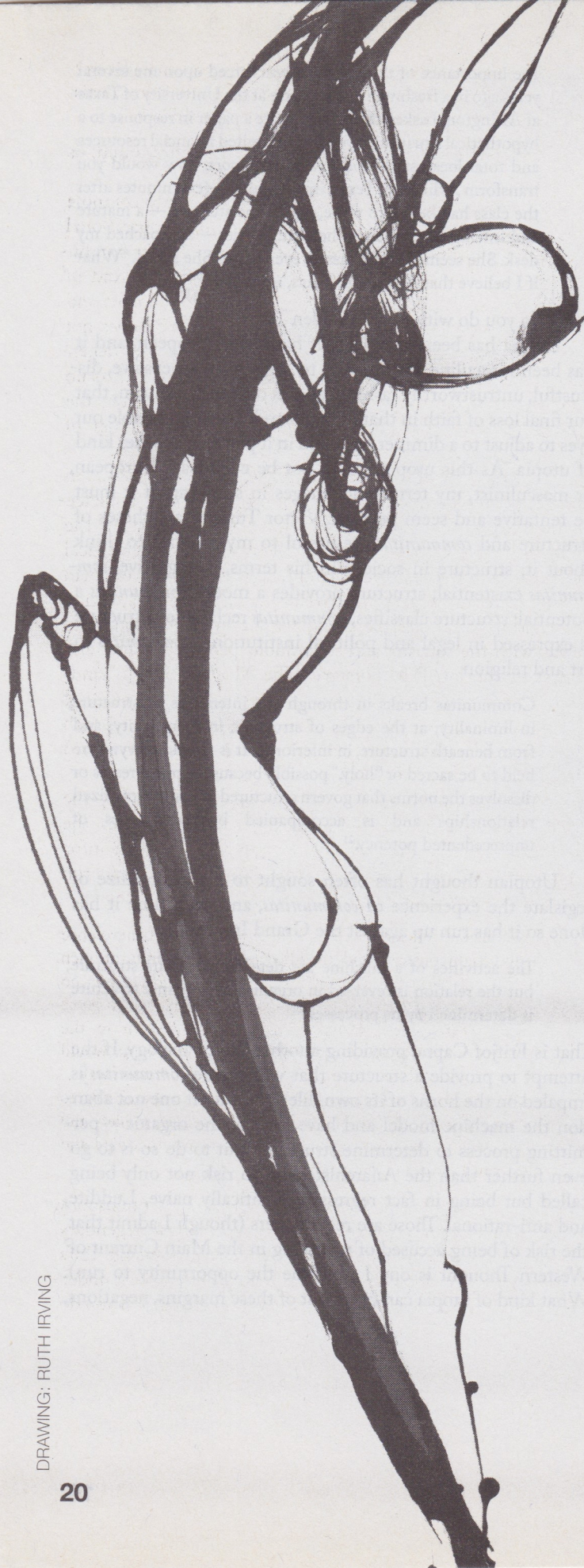
Utopia has been euclidean, it has been European, and it has been masculine. I am trying to suggest, in an evasive, distrustful, untrustworthy fashion, and as obscurely as I can, that our final loss of faith in that radiant sandcastle may enable our eyes to adjust to a dimmer light and in it perceive another kind of utopia. As this utopia would not be euclidean, European, or masculinist, my terms and images in speaking of it must be tentative and seem peculiar. Victor Turner's antitheses of structure and *communitas* are useful to my attempt to think about it: structure in society, in his terms, is cognitive, *communitas* existential; structure provides a model, *communitas* a potential; structure classifies, *communitas* reclassifies; structure is expressed in legal and political institutions, *communitas* in art and religion.

Communitas breaks in through the interstices of structure, in liminality; at the edges of structure, in marginality; and from beneath structure, in inferiority. It is almost everywhere held to be sacred or "holy," possibly because it transgresses or dissolves the norms that govern structured or institutionalized relationships and is accompanied by experiences of unprecedented potency.²¹

Utopian thought has often sought to institutionalize or legislate the experience of *communitas*, and each time it has done so it has run up against the Grand Inquisitor.

The activities of a machine are determined by its structure, but the relation is reversed in organisms—organic structure is determined by its processes.²²

That is Fritjof Capra, providing another useful analogy. If the attempt to provide a structure that will ensure *communitas* is impaled on the horns of its own dilemma, might one not abandon the machine model and have a go at the organic—permitting process to determine structure? But to do so is to go even further than the Anarchists, and to risk not only being called but being in fact regressive, politically naive, Luddite, and anti-rational. Those are real dangers (though I admit that the risk of being accused of not being in the Main Current of Western Thought is one I welcome the opportunity to run). What kind of utopia can come out of these margins, negations,



DRAWING: RUTH IRVING

and obscurities?ⁱ Who will even recognize it as a utopia? It won't look the way it ought to. It may look very like come kind of place Coyote made after having a conversation with his own dung.

The symbol which Trickster embodies is not a static one.

Paul Radin speaking. You will recall that the quality of static perfection is an essential element of the non-inhabitability of the euclidean utopia (a point that Bob Elliott discusses with much cogency).

The symbol which Trickster embodies is not a static one. It contains within itself the promise of differentiation, the promise of god and man. For this reason every generation occupies itself with interpreting Trickster anew. No generation understands him fully but no generation can do without him ... for he represents not only the undifferentiated and distant past, but likewise the undifferentiated present within every individual.... If we laugh at him, he grins at us. What happens to him happens to us.²³

And he never was in Eden, because coyotes live in the New World. Driven forth by the angel with the flaming sword, Eve and Adam lifted their sad heads and saw Coyote, grinning.

Non-European, non-euclidean, non-masculinist: they are all negative definitions, which is all right, but tiresome; and the last is unsatisfactory, as it might be taken to mean that the utopia I'm trying to approach could only be imagined by women—which is possible—or only inhabited by women—which is intolerable. Perhaps the word I need is yin.

Utopia has been yang. In one way or another, from Plato on, utopia has been the big yang motorcycle trip. Bright, dry, clear, strong, firm, active, aggressive, lineal, progressive, creative, expanding, advancing, and hot.

Our civilization is now so intensely yang that any imagination of bettering its injustices or eluding its self-destructiveness must involve a reversal.

The ten thousand things arise together
and I watch their return.

They return each to its root.

Returning to one's roots is known as stillness.

Returning to one's destiny is known as the constant.

Knowledge of the constant is known as discernment.

ⁱ When I was struggling with the writing of this piece, I had not read the four volumes of Robert Nichols' *Daily Lives in Nghsi-Altai* (New York: New Directions, 1977-79). I am glad that I had not, because my thoughts could not then have so freely and fecklessly coincided, collided, and intersected with his. My paper would have been written in the consciousness of the existence of Nghsi-Altai, as Pierre Menard's *Quixote* was written in the consciousness of the existence of Cervantes' *Quixote*, and might have been even more different from what it is than Menard's *Quixote* from Cervantes'. But it can be and I hope will be *read* in the consciousness of the existence of Nghsi-Altai; and the fact that Nghsi-Altai is in some respects the very place I was laboriously trying to get to, and yet lies in quite the opposite direction, can only enlarge the use and meaning of my work. Indeed, if this note leads some readers to go find Nghsi-Altai for themselves, the whole thing will have been worthwhile.

To ignore the constant
is to go wrong, and end in disorder.²⁴

To attain the constant, to end in order, we must return, go round, go inward, go yinward. What would a yin utopia be? It would be dark, wet, obscure, weak, yielding, passive, participatory, circular, cyclical, peaceful, nurturant, retreating, contracting, and cold.

Now on the subject of heat and cold: a reference in *The Shape of Utopia* sent me to a 1960 lecture by M. Lévi-Strauss, "The Scope of Anthropology," which so influenced my efforts to think out this paper that I wish to quote from it at some length, with apologies to those of you to whom the passage²⁵ is familiar. He is speaking of "primitive" societies.

Although they exist in history, these societies seem to have worked out or retained a certain wisdom which makes them desperately resist any structural modification which might afford history a point of entry into their lives. The societies which have best protected their distinctive character appear to be those concerned above all with persevering in their existence.

Perservering in one's existence is the particular quality of the organism; it is not a progress towards achievement, followed by stasis, which is the machine's mode, but an interactive, rhythmic, and unstable process, which constitutes an end in itself.

The way in which they exploit the environment guarantees them a modest standard of living as well as the conservation of natural resources. Though various, their rules of marriage reveal to the demographer's eye a common function; to set the fertility rate very low, and to keep it constant. Finally, a political life based upon consent, and admitting of no decisions but those arrived at unanimously, would seem designed to preclude the possibility of calling on that driving force of collective life which takes advantage of the contrast between power and opposition, majority and minority, exploiter and exploited.

Lévi-Strauss is about to make his distinction between the "hot" societies, which have appeared since the Neolithic Revolution, and in which "differentiations between castes and between classes are urged without cease, in order that social change and energy may be extracted from them," and the "cold" societies, self-limited, whose historical temperature is pretty near zero.

The relevance of this beautiful piece of anthropological thinking to my subject is immediately proven by Lévi-Strauss himself, who in the next paragraph thanks Heaven that anthropologists are not expected to predict man's future, but says that if they were, instead of merely extrapolating from our own "hot" society, they might propose a progressive integration of the best of the "hot" with the best of the "cold."

If I understand him, this unification would involve carrying the Industrial Revolution, already the principal source of social energy, to its logical extreme: the completed Electronic Revolution. After this, change and progress would be strictly cultural and, as it were, machine-made.

With culture having integrally taken over the burden of manufacturing progress, society..., placed outside and above

history, could once more assume that regular and as it were crystalline structure, which the surviving primitive societies teach us is not antagonistic to the human condition.

The last phrase, from that austere and somber mind, is poignant.

As I understand it, Lévi-Strauss suggests that to combine the hot and the cold is to transfer mechanical operational modes to machines while retaining organic modes for humanity. Mechanical progress; biological rhythm. A kind of superspeed electronic yang train, in whose yin pullmans and dining cars life is serene and the rose on the table does not even tremble. What worries me in this model is the dependence upon cybernetics as the integrating function. Who's up there in the engineer's seat? Is it on auto? Who wrote the program—old Nobodaddy Reason again? Is it another of those trains with no brakes?

It may simply be the bad habits of my mind that see in this brief utopian glimpse a brilliant update of an old science-fiction theme: the world where robots do the work while the human beings sit back and play. These were always satirical works. The rule was that either an impulsive young man wrecked the machinery and saved humanity from stagnation, or else the machines, behaving with impeccable logic, did away with the squashy and superfluous people. The first and finest of the lot, E.M. Forster's "The Machine Stops," ends on a characteristic double chord of terror and promise: the machinery collapses, the crystalline society is shattered with it, but outside there are free people—how civilized, we don't know, but outside and free.

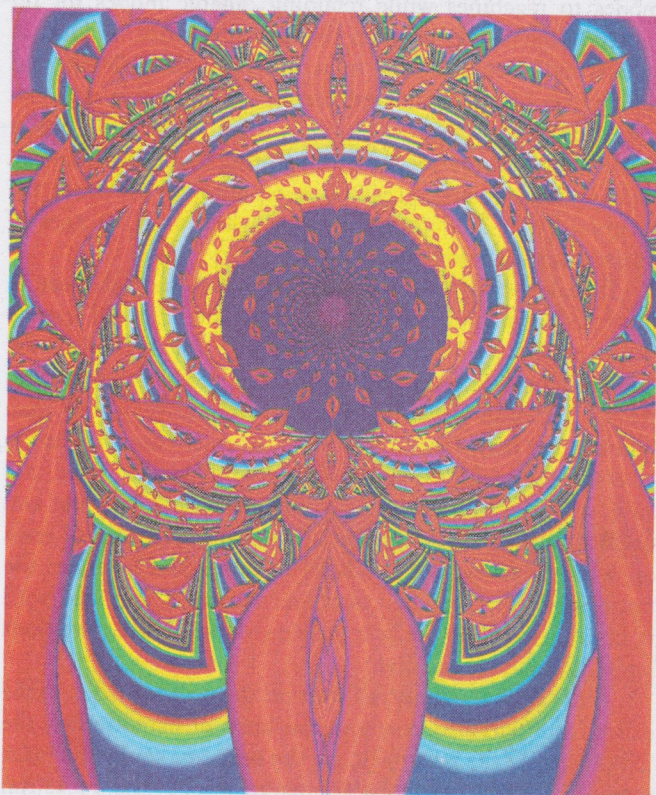
We're back to Kundera's wart on the walls of Eden—the exiles from paradise in whom the hope of paradise lies, the inhabitants of the gulag who are the only free souls. The information systems of the train are marvelous, but the tracks run through Coyote country.

In ancient times the Yellow Emperor first used benevolence and righteousness and meddled with the minds of men. Yao and Shun followed him and worked till there was no more hair on their shins...in the practice of benevolence and righteousness, taxed their blood and breath in the establishment of laws and standards. But still some would not submit to their rule, and had to be exiled, driven away. ... The world coveted knowledge,...there were axes and saws to shape things, ink and plumbines to trim them, mallets and gouges to poke holes in them, and the world, muddled and deranged, was in great confusion.²⁶

That is Chuang Tzu, the first great Trickster of philosophy, sending a raspberry to the Yellow Emperor, the legendary model of rational control. Things were hot in Chuang Tzu's day, too, and he proposed a radical cooling off. The best understanding, he said, "rests in what it cannot understand. If you do

not understand this, then Heaven the Equalizer will destroy you."²⁷ i

Having copied out this sentence, I obeyed, letting my understanding rest in what it could not understand, and went to the *I Ching*. I asked that book please to describe a yin utopia for me. It replied with Hexagram 30, the doubled trigram Fire, with a single changing line in the first place taking me



to Hexagram 56, the Wanderer. The writing of the rest of this paper and the revisions of it were considerably influenced by a continuing rumination of those texts.

If utopia is a place that does not exist, then surely (as Lao Tzu would say) the way to get there is by the way that is not a way. And in the same vein, the nature of the utopia I am trying to describe is such that if it is to come, it must exist already.

I believe that it does:ⁱⁱ most clearly as an element in such deeply unsatisfactory utopian works as Hudson's *A Crystal World* or Aldous Huxley's *Island*. Indeed Bob Elliot ended his book on utopia with a discussion of *Island*. Huxley's "extraordinary achievement," he says, "is to have made the old utopian goal—the central human goal—thinkable once more."²⁸ Those are the last words of the book. It is very like Bob that they should be not the closing but the opening of a door.

i "Heaven the Equalizer" was translated by James Legge as "the Lathe of Heaven," a fine phrase, from which I have got considerable mileage; but Joseph Needham has gently pointed out to me that when Chuang Tzu was writing the Chinese had not yet invented the lathe. Fortunately we now have Burton Watson's wonderfully satisfying translation to turn to.

ii In Nghsi-Altai — partly.

The major utopic element in my novel *The Dispossessed* is a variety of pacifist anarchism, which is about as yin as a political ideology can get. Anarchism rejects the identification of civilization with the state, and the identification of power with coercion; against the inherent violence of the "hot" society it asserts the value of such antisocial behavior as the general refusal of women to bear arms in war; and other coyote devices. In these areas anarchism and Taoism converge both in matter and manner, and so I came there to play my fictional games. The structure of the book may suggest the balance-in-motion and rhythmic recurrence of the Tai Chi, but its excess yang shows: though the utopia was (both in fact and in fiction) founded by a woman, the protagonist is a man; and he dominates it in, I must say, a very masculine fashion. Fond as I am of him, I'm not going to let him talk here. I want to hear a different voice. This is Lord Dorn, addressing the Council of his country, on June 16, 1906. He is talking not to, but about, us.

With them the son and the father are of different civilizations and are strangers to each other. They move too fast to see more than the surface glitter of a life too swift to be real. They are assailed by too many new things ever to find the depths in the old before it has gone by. The rush of life past them they call progress, though it is too rapid for them to move with it. Man remains the same, baffled and astonished, with a heap of new things around him but gone before he knows them. Men may live many sorts of lives, and this they call "opportunity," and believe opportunity good without ever examining any one of those lives to know if it is good. We have fewer ways of life and most of us never know but one. It is a rich way, and its richness we have not yet exhausted. ...They cannot be blamed for seeing nothing good in us that will be destroyed by them. The good we have they do not understand, or even see.²⁹

Now, this speech might have been made in the council of any non-Western nation or people at the time of its encounter with Europeans in numbers. This could be a Kikuyu talking, or a Japanese—and certainly Japan's decision to Westernize was in the author's mind—and it is almost painfully close to the observations of Black Elk, Standing Bear, Plenty-Coups, and other native North American spokesmen.

Islandia is not a hot but a warm society: it has a definite though flexible class hierarchy, and has adopted some elements of industrial technology; it certainly has and is conscious of its history, though it has not yet entered into world history, mainly because, like California, it is geographically marginal and remote. In this central debate at the Council of Islandia, the hinge of the book's plot and structure, a deliberate choice is made to get no hotter: to reject the concept of progress as a wrong direction, and to accept persevering in one's existence as a completely worthy social goal.

In how many other utopias is this choice rationally propounded, argued, and made?

It is easy to dismiss *Islandia* as a mere fantasy of the Golden Age, naively escapist or regressive. I believe it is a mistake to do so, and that the options it offers are perhaps more realistic and more urgent than those of most utopias.

Here is M. Lévi-Strauss once more, this time on the subject of viruses:

The reality of a virus is almost of an intellectual order. In effect, its organism is reduced practically to the genetic formula that it injects into simple or complex beings, thus forcing their cells to betray their characteristic formula in order to obey its own and to manufacture beings like itself.

In order for our civilization to appear, the previous and simultaneous existence of other civilizations was necessary. And we know, since Descartes, that its originality consists essentially of a method which, because of its intellectual nature, is not suited to generating other civilizations of flesh and blood, but one which can impose its formula on them and force them to become like it. In comparison with these civilizations—whose living art expresses their corporeal quality because it relates to very intense beliefs and, in its conception as much as in its execution, to a certain state of equilibrium between man and nature—does our own civilization correspond to an animal or a viral type?³⁰

This is the virus that Lord Dorn saw carried by the most innocent tourist from Europe or the United States: a plague against which his people had no immunity. Was he wrong?

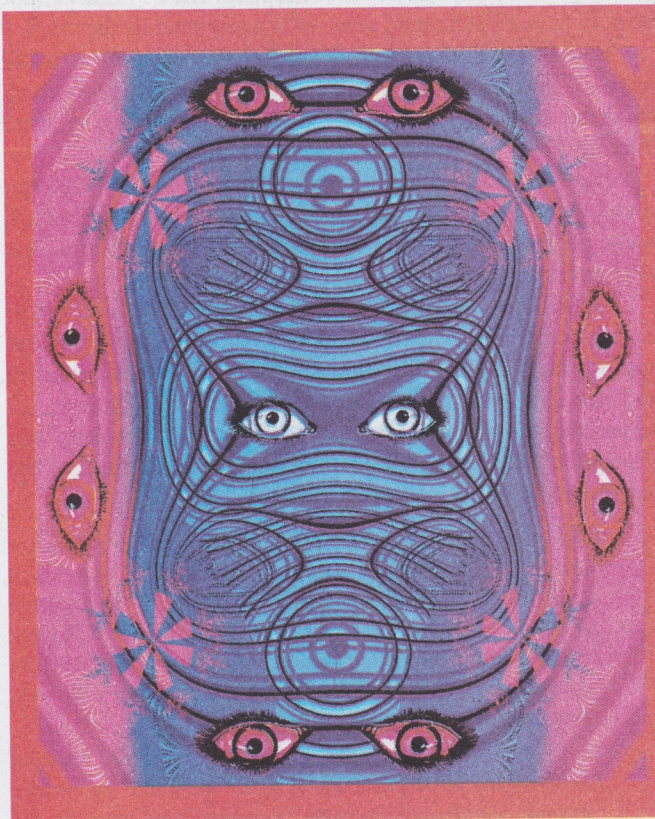
Any small society that tried to make Lord Dorn's choice has, in fact, been forcibly infected; and the big, numerous civilizations—Japan, India, and now China—have either chosen to infect themselves with the viral fever or have failed to make any choice, all too often mixing the most exploitive features of the hot world with the most passive of the cold in a way that almost guarantees the impossibility of their persevering in their own existence or allowing local nature to continue in health. I wanted to speak of *Islandia* because I know no other utopian work that takes for its central intellectual concern this matter of "Westernization" or "progress," which is perhaps the central fact of our times. Of course the book provides no answer or solution; it simply indicates the way that cannot be gone. It is an enantiadroma, a *reculer pour mieux sauter*, a porcupine backing into a crevice. It goes sideways. That's very likely why it gets left out of the survey courses in Utopian Lit. But side trips and reversals are precisely what minds stuck in forward gear most need, and in its very quality of forswearing "futurity," of standing aside—and of having been left aside—*Islandia* is, I suggest, a valuable as well as an endearing book.

It is to some degree a Luddite book as well; and I am forced now to ask: Is it our high technology that gives our civilization its invasive, self-replicating, mechanical forward drive? In itself, and technology is "infectious" only as other useful or impressive elements of culture are; ideas, institutions, fashions too, may be self-replicating and irresistibly imitable. Obviously, technology is an essential element of all cultures and very often, in the form of potsherds or bits of styrofoam, all they leave behind in time. It is far too basic to all civilization to be characterized in itself as either yin or yang, I think. But at this point, here and now, the continuously progressing character of our technology, and the continuous change that depends upon it—"the manufacture of progress," as Lévi-Strauss called it—is the principal vehicle of the yang, or

"hotness," of our society.

One need not smash one's typewriter and go bomb the laundromat, after all, because one has lost faith in the continuous advance of technology as the way towards utopia. Technology remains, in itself, an endless creative source. I only wish that I could follow Lévi-Strauss in seeing it as leading from the civilization that turns men into machines to "the civilization that will turn machines into men."³¹ But I cannot. I do not see how

IMAGE: TAMMY WETZEL



even the almost ethereal technologies promised by electronics and information theory can offer more than the promise of the simplest tool: to make life materially easier, to enrich us. That is a great promise and gain! But if this enrichment of one type of civilization occurs only at the cost of the destruction of all other species and their inorganic matrix of earth, water, and air, and at increasingly urgent risk to the existence of all life on the planet, then it seems fairly clear to me that to count upon technological advance for *anything but* technological advance is a mistake. I have not been convincingly shown, and seem to be totally incapable of imagining for myself, how any further technological advance of any kind will bring us any closer to being a society predominantly concerned with preserving its existence; a society with a modest standard of living, conservative of natural resources, with a low constant fertility rate and a political life based upon consent; a society that has made a successful adaptation to its environment and has learned to live without destroying itself or the people next door. But that is the society I want to be able to imagine—I must be able to imagine, for one does not get on without hope.

What are we offered by way of hope? Models, plans,

blueprints, wiring diagrams. Prospects of ever more inclusive communications systems linking virus to virus all over the globe—no secrets, as Kundera says. Little closed orbiting test-tubes full of viruses, put up by the L-5 Society, in perfect obedience to our compulsion to, as they say, “build the future”—to be Zeus, to have power over what happens, to control. Knowledge is power, and we want to know what comes next, we want it all mapped out.

Coyote country has not been mapped. The way that cannot be gone is not in the road atlas, or is every road in the atlas.

In the *Handbook of the Indians of California*, A.L. Kroeber wrote, “The California Indians...usually refuse pointblank to make even an attempt [to draw a map], alleging utter inability.”³²

The euclidean utopia is mapped; it is geometrically organized, with the parts labeled *a, a', b*: a diagram or model, which social engineers can follow and reproduce. Reproduction, the viral watchword.

In the *Handbook*, discussing the so-called Kuksu Cult or Kuksu Society—a clustering of rites and observances found among the Yuki, Pomo, Maidu, Wintu, Miwok, Costanoan, and Esselen peoples of Central California—Kroeber observed that our use of the terms “the cult” or “a society,” our perception of a general or abstract entity, Kuksu, falsifies the native perception:

The only societies were those of the town unit. They were not branches, because there was no parent stem. Our method, in any such situation, religious or otherwise, is to constitute a central and superior body. Since the day of the Roman empire and the Christian church, we hardly think of a social activity except as it is coherently organized into a definite unit definitely subdivided.

But it must be recognized that such a tendency is not an inherent and inescapable one of all civilization. If we are able to think socially only in terms of an organized machine, the California native was just as unable to think in those terms.

When we recall with how slender a machinery and how rudimentary and organization the whole business of Greek civilization was carried out, it becomes easily intelligible that the...Californian could dispense with almost all endeavors in this direction, which to us seem vital.³³

Copernicus told us that the earth was not the center. Darwin told us that man is not the center. If we listened to the anthropologists we might hear them telling us, with appropriate indirectness, that the White West is not the center. The center of the world is a bluff on the Klamath River, a rock in Mecca, a hole in the ground in Greece, nowhere, its circumference everywhere.

Perhaps the utopist should heed this unsettling news at last. Perhaps the utopist would do well to lose the plan, throw away the map, get off the motorcycle, put on a very strange-looking hat, bark sharply three times, and trot off looking thin, yellow, and dingy across the desert and up into the digger pines.

I don't think we're ever going to get to utopia again by going forward, but only roundabout or sideways; because we're in a rational dilemma, an either/or situation as perceived

by the binary computer mentality, and neither the either nor the or is a place where people can live. Increasingly often in these increasingly hard times I am asked by people I respect and admire, “Are you going to write books about the terrible injustice and misery of our world, or are you going to write escapist and consolatory fantasies?” I am urged by some to do one—by some to do the other. I am offered the Grand Inquisitor's choice. Will you choose freedom without happiness, or happiness without freedom? The only answer one can make, I think, is: No.

Back round once more. *Usà puyew usu wapiw!*

If the word [utopia] is to be redeemed, it will have to be by someone who has followed utopia into the abyss which yawns behind the Grand Inquisitor's vision, and who then has clambered out on the other side.³⁴

Sounds like Coyote to me. Falls into things, traps, abysses, and then clammers out somehow, grinning stupidly. Is it possible that we are in fact no longer confronting the Grand Inquisitor? Could he be the Father Figure whom we have set up before us? Could it be that by turning around we can put him behind us, and leave him staring like Ozymandias King of Kings out across the death camps, the gulags, the Waste Land, the uninhabitable kingdom of Zeus, the binary-option, single-vision country where one must choose between happiness and freedom?

If so, then we are in the abyss behind him. Not out. A typical Coyote predicament. We have got ourselves into a really bad mess and have got to get out; and we have to be sure that it's the other side we get out to; and when we do get out, we shall be changed.

I have no idea who we will be or what it may be like on the other side, though I believe there are people there. They have always lived there. It's home. There are songs they sing there; one of the songs is called “Dancing at the edge of the world.” If we, clambering up out of the abyss, ask questions of them, they won't draw maps, alleging utter inability; but they may point. One of them might point in the direction of Arlington, Texas. I live there, she says. See how beautiful it is!

This is the New World! we will cry, bewildered but delighted. We have discovered the New World!

Oh, no, Coyote will say. No, this is the old world. The one I made.

You made it for us! we will cry, amazed and grateful.

I wouldn't go so far as to say that, says Coyote. **FE**

NOTES

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15. Elliott, p. 87.

16. Lao Tzu, *Tao Teh Ching*, Book II, Chapter 38.

17. William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Book III, *Proverbs of Heaven and Hell*, line 21.

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19. William Blake, *Vala, or the Four Zoas*, Book IX, lines 162-167, 178-181, 186, 189-191.

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23. Paul Radin, *The Trickster* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), 1956), p. 168.

24. Lao Tzu, Book I, Chapter 16.

25. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Scope of Anthropology* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1968), pp. 46-47. Also included in *Structural Anthropology II* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), pp. 28-30. The version here is my own amalgam of the two translations.

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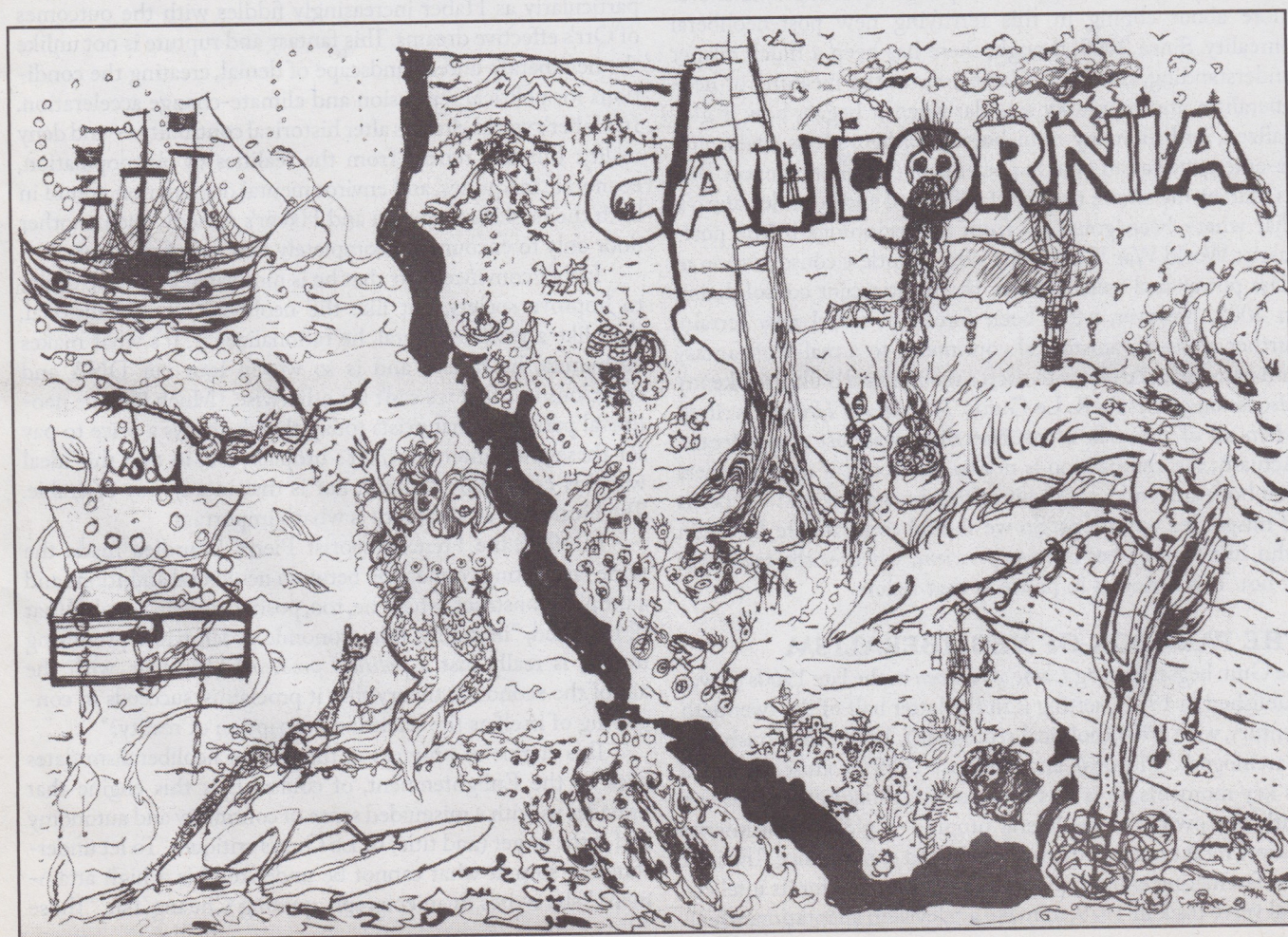
31. Lévi-Strauss, *Scope of Anthropology*, p. 49.

32. Alfred L. Kroeber, *Handbook of the Indians of California*, Smithsonian Institution, *Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin* no. 78 (Washington, D.C., 1925), p. 344.

33. Ibid., p. 374.

34. Elliott, p

DRAWING: RUTH IRVING



Ursula K. Le Guin's *Lathe of Heaven*: A Post-Neoliberal Parable?

JOSH GOSICAK

To objectivise life means to destroy it.

— Ana Esther Cecune

Development Dialogue, January 2009.

The Marxist David Harvey, who has made an academic career out of tracking neoliberal thought from the bungled Chilean coup in 1973 to present, achieved near-notoriety in the fall of 2008, as did a lot of other radicals who found themselves suddenly in demand on lecture circuits. With derivative market/swaps surfacing like so much bilge at a gated resort, many of us were intellectually unprepared for the sweep and alarm of the panic. But Harvey's analysis was a soothing tonic. Invariably, though, as Harvey recalled (in December 2008), those discussions came down to neoliberalism and its predicted end. And, inevitably, he'd reply: "Well, it depends on what you *mean* by neoliberalism."

Those discussions continued, of course, heated and passionate, but ever less about the predicted collapse, and ever more about coping in this terrifying new post-neoliberal unreality. Since 2008, though, there has been a much deeper understanding, thanks to Harvey, about the meaning of neoliberalism and its murky agenda: when it began, how it globalized, and its many mini-bursts, configurations, stalls, and re-emergence as an evasive post-neoliberal phenomenon. But, as Harvey insists, we need to stay focused and consider, always, that what's been going on from its beginnings in the post-fascist World War II era is the slow relentless consolidation of class power and wealth. Since the most recent consolidation in 2008, however, we've been forced to travel new terrain, further along an ahistorical continuum to a realm of fantasy and paradoxes. And it is to such a realm that I'd like to take my discussion of Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Lathe of Heaven*, written when all of this talk of neoliberalism was just a pipedream. Actually, the comparison is not so farfetched if one considers that both are works about unreality, abnegation, and the perils of misguided ambitions. So we should congratulate Le Guin who, like Harvey, has been so *prescient*, whether she realizes it or not. This review is in praise of that vision.

THE PARADOX OF NEOLIBERALISM

Le Guin began writing *Lathe of Heaven* in the late 1960s (it was published in 1971), setting it in the latter half of the twentieth century, with 1984 (political repression), 1998 (The Crash, the Carcinogenic Plagues), and the post-1998 dreamscape world as key moments. It is this dreamscape, though, that I equate with our own post-neoliberal utopia—a global consumerist society built upon whim, narcissism, and convenience. The idea was fascinating enough to intrigue PBS, known for its intellectual verve back in 1979, to make a television adaptation, which

Le Guin co-produced. Another version followed in 2002, though it was not as popular.

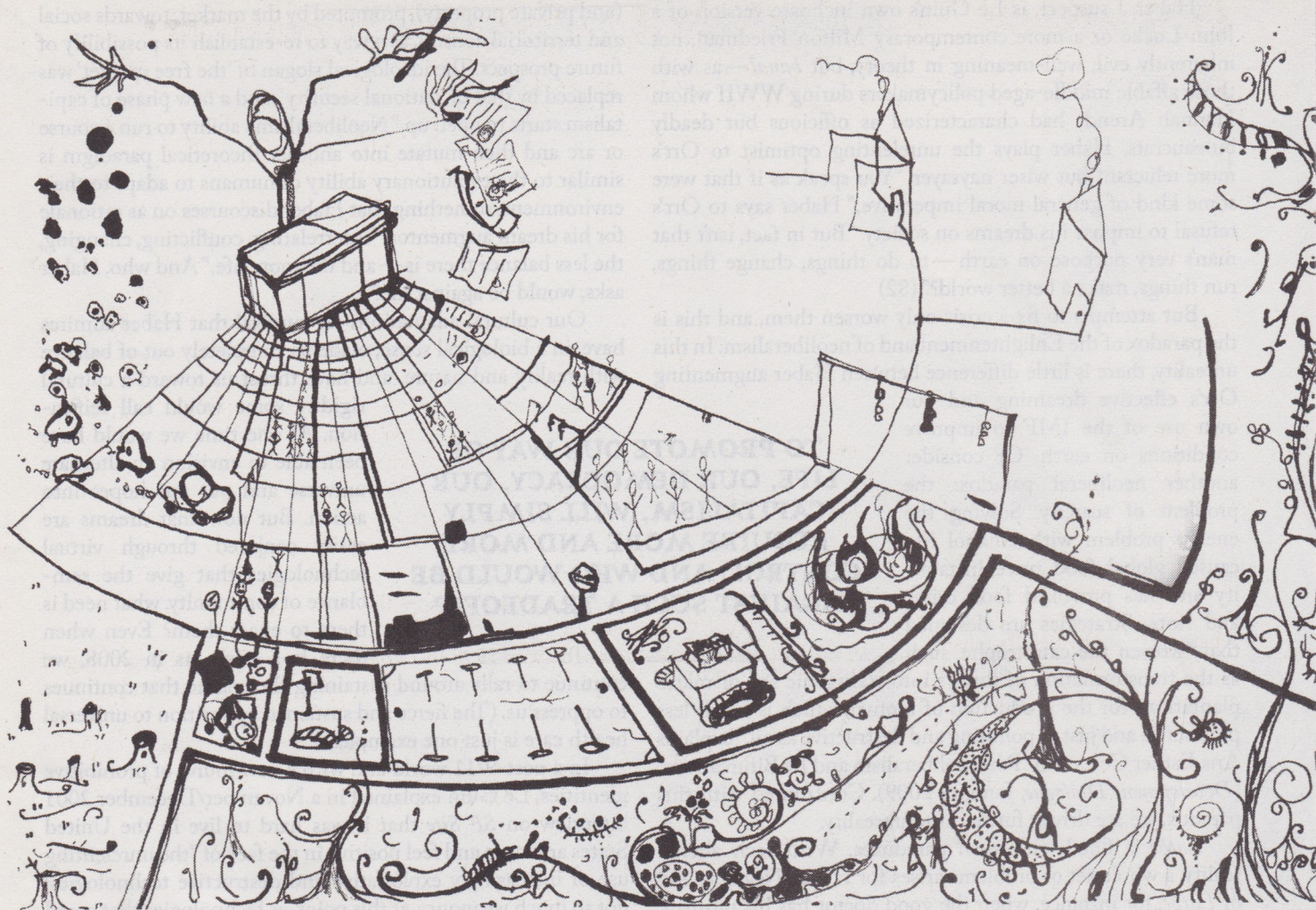
The landscape in the novel is post-apocalyptic, and after a series of wars, economic crashes, famines, plagues, and severe environmental problems through the 1980s and 1990s, bad enough to alter weather patterns, there just isn't much left of the planet except for Portland, Oregon, around which the novel unpacks amid an endless deluge of acidic rain. It is in such a world that Le Guin places the main character George Orr, who has a special talent for dreams that alter reality, and William Haber, a psychologist, his antagonist, who seeks to cure him of his ability to dream, and in the process to acquire that ability, with the help of his dream augmentor, to rid society of its ills. It is a mighty task that only someone of Haber's grand liberal—should I dare say *neo*?—intellect can undertake.

The year 1998 in *Lathe of Heaven* marks the beginning of the end of normal life, and a descent into fantasy and rupture, particularly as Haber increasingly fiddles with the outcomes of Orr's effective dreams. This fantasy and rupture is not unlike the neoliberal's unreal landscape of denial, creating the conditions for political repression and climate-change acceleration. In Haber's world, dreams alter historical continuity—and deny reality. But this retreat from the realities of overpopulation, economic inequities, and environmental degradation, found in both the neoliberal agenda and Haber's remedy, open another door only to encounter a completely new set of problems.

Haber convinces Orr that he is motivated by a deep desire to improve society, but like the neoliberal, it is delusional. And like a *good* neoliberal, he rationalizes it. It's what makes us human, he boasts, and is so woven into our DNA and consciousness that we can't act otherwise. (Much like the neoliberal paradigm that exists today, there's always a price to pay for these good intentions.) It's utopian, too, in that this ideal world is never fully realized, nor is that in any way desirable. The illusion of attainability is what's important.

In 1998, the French theorist Pierre Bourdieu made the same fascinating connection between neoliberal ambitions and a utopian construct, which he, too, posited as delusional. What if, he asked, "in reality, this economic order, while promising utopia, is really just a *political problem*? One that, with the aid of the economic theory that it proclaims, succeeds in conceiving of itself as the scientific description of reality?"

This engine of progress at the core of neoliberalism dates back to the Enlightenment, of course. It is this engine that provides us with a misguided sense of continuity and autonomy and is the target (and title) of Le Guin's critique: "To let understanding stop at what cannot be understood is a high attainment," she writes in an epigraph, quoting Chuang Tsu. "Those



DRAWING: RUTH IRVING

who cannot do it will be destroyed on the lathe of heaven" (30). Haber and his ambitions exemplify that engine of progress that exacerbates the contradictions and disconnections found in neoliberalism. But in *Lathe*, Le Guin naturally takes a more Taoist approach, and so her critique is considerably broadened to include the Enlightenment as well as late twentieth century liberal democracy.

"It's like a fairy tale," she explained to Bill Moyers during a 1980 interview. "Someone is trying to do good, but is defeated by reality, because doing good is not enough." The historical parallels in the book to the unrealities of this late twentieth century world of neoliberalism is what distinguishes Le Guin's novel from other science fiction of the era. It's less pulpy, speculative, even conceptual (i.e., setting off on hyper-linked realities through Haber's augmentor) than a parable on the follies of the Enlightenment. But Le Guin admitted to Moyers that she had no idea *what* she was writing or where the plot would take her. She described how the characters talked to her—particularly George Orr, how she had to be patient and wait, then listen. All this has a mystical—even Taoist—touch. Most writers are too impatient to listen to their characters, imposing their wills on them, very much as Haber does in *Lathe of Heaven*. Most of us don't even get it,

and when we think we have it, as when Moyers pointed out that this listening was a part of being *creative*, we immediately move toward generalities. LeGuin, though, seemed to have had something else in mind, but Moyers pursue it.¹

What makes *Lathe* such a potent and unforgiving critique of liberalism (*à la* 1960s, personified by the pragmatist-capitalist-psychologist Dr. Haber) and, of course, neoliberalism, is that *all* well-meaning intentions, residuals of the Enlightenment, are self-abnegating. The dystopia is deeply buried within us, in our notions of progress, in humanity. All we need to do is revisit the slave trade of the 1600s to see an obscene barbarity piloted by a divinely-inspired philosophy of good intentions. That it persisted so long was due in part to a cautious liberal democracy. In hindsight, the Enlightenment—the predecessor to neoliberalism—legitimized and sustained the hegemony, with a stark unreality based on equality and democracy.

¹ In a December 2001 interview that appeared online at *SF Site*, Le Guin elaborated, "I have never written a plot-driven novel. I admire plot from a vast distance, with unenvious admiration. I don't do it; never did it; don't want to; can't. My stories are driven (rather slowly and erratically, with pauses to admire apparently irrelevant scenery) by a different chauffeur."

Haber, I suspect, is Le Guin's own inchoate version of a John Locke or a more contemporary Milton Friedman, not inherently evil, well-meaning in theory, but *banal*—as with those affable middle-aged policymakers during WWII whom Hannah Arendt had characterized as officious but deadly bureaucrats. Haber plays the unrelenting optimist to Orr's more reluctant but wiser naysayer. "You speak as if that were some kind of general moral imperative," Haber says to Orr's refusal to impose his dreams on society. "But in fact, isn't that man's very purpose on earth—to do things, change things, run things, make a better world?" (82)

But attempts to fix a crisis only worsen them, and this is the paradox of the Enlightenment and of neoliberalism. In this unreality, there is little difference between Haber augmenting Orr's effective dreaming and our own use of the IMF to improve conditions on earth. Or consider another neoliberal paradox: the problem of scarcity. Solving the energy problem with ethanol has caused global food price instability and has provoked food crises and riots. Strategies are designed that "worsen the catastrophe, such as the transformation of forests into transgenic soy or maize plantations for the production of biofuel, which is much less productive and just as polluting and destructive as oil," explains Ana Esther Cecena in "Postneoliberalism and Its Bifurcations" (*Development Dialogue*, January 2009). Confronted with this paradox, we are driven further into unreality.

Lathe is filled with such paradoxes. With each altered reality, a whole set of problems arises for Haber. Near the end of *Lathe*, for instance, when the good doctor has his ultimate neoliberal dream-wish—a society without racial prejudice—it comes with a price: security, uniformity, homogeneity, *amnesia*. This is precisely the post-neoliberal moment for us as well. Orr dreams up a world where *race* simply doesn't exist. "I was envisaging a political and ethical solution," Haber complains to Orr, after he has effectively dreamed the racial homogenization of society. "Instead of which, your primary thinking processes took the usual short cut, which usually turns out to be a short circuit, which this time they went to the root. Made the change biological and absolute. There never was a racial problem! You and I are the only two men on earth, George, who know that there ever was a racial problem!" And this is absolutely true about our own reality: increasingly, as we move through this "end of history" paradigm (which I'll touch on shortly), we are unable to imagine a pre- or even a post-capitalist world! Writing in 2007 of the looming credit crisis and the aftermath of Katrina, *Guardian* columnist George Monbiot remarked smugly that "We are all neoliberals now."

Call it whatever you like, each attempt to correct reality—whether a new phase of democratic capitalism, or enlightened humanism, or globalization—sets the terms for more exploitive actions. "The same system saw itself obliged to go beyond neoliberalism," explains Cecena in *Development Dialogue*, "in moving its ordering axis from individual freedom

(and private property), promoted by the market, towards social and territorial control, as a way to re-establish its possibility of future prospect. The ideological slogan of 'the free market' was replaced by that of 'national security', and a new phase of capitalism starts to open up." Neoliberalism's ability to run a course or arc and then mutate into another theoretical paradigm is similar to the evolutionary ability of humans to adapt to their environment, something that Haber discourses on as rationale for his dream augmentor: "interrelating, conflicting, changing, the less balance there is—and the more life." And who, Haber asks, would be against life?

Our cultural adaptations for survival that Haber admires have, in a biological sense, made us completely out of balance with reality and nature, and have thrust us toward a cultural rigidity some would call reification. At one time we would have been able to envision an alternate universe and put our hopes into action. But now that dreams are easily conjured through virtual technologies that give the semblance of community, what need is there to enact them? Even when there is a crisis, as in 2008, we

continue to rally around sustaining the engine that continues to oppress us. (The fierce and sustained opposition to universal health care is just one example.)

In a post-9/11 world and with a new round of prohibitive identities, Le Guin explained in a November/December 2001 interview on *SF Site* that it was hard to live in the United States anymore and feel positive in the face of "the unrelenting use of increasingly exploitative and destructive technologies: not so much weaponry, at this point, as technologies that could and should be useful and productive." Haber's augmentor is an example of such benign technology gone exploitive. Despite Orr's plea to be cured, Haber ignores his wishes because that would work *against* the "greater good" of humanity. Still, Orr persists: "Please stop using my dreams to improve things, Dr. Haber. It won't work. It's wrong. I want to be cured." Haber, of course, in his manipulation of dreams, and in his quest for a liberal—and benign—democracy creates the ultimate NGO.

And not surprisingly, no one is able to question Haber's hegemonic actions anymore. Because Haber controls dreams, no one has any fixed point of revolt in a history that is continually being subverted and rewritten. A nice conundrum, indeed. And when Haber toasts "To a better world!" it is to the availability of bourbon, conjured up in an effective dream and not a pledge to resuscitate a malfunctioning world. The paradox, for the neoliberal in Haber, at least, is that Citizen Orr refuses to be a party to deceit, and instead just wants the real thing, in all its horrors and imperfections.

Ulrich Brand, one of the editors of the January 2009 *Development Dialogue* issue on neoliberalism, explains that this post-neoliberal gloss is actually a "politics of destruction," maintained through "specious liberalisation, deregulation and privatisation." Michael Brie, in that same issue, calls it a shape-

**TO PROMOTE OUR WAY OF
LIFE, OUR DEMOCRACY, OUR
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shifter that promotes a type of stalled “decivilization,” lurching from one clamity to the next without identity or history. It’s an utterly sad place, where revolutionary actions are limited to “the perpetual caretaking of the museum of human history,” as Francis Fukuyama wrote of “The End of History.” Except for the increasing repression, our post-neoliberal landscape resembles Fukuyama’s museum piece, one devoid of real meaning, people, and feelings. But for Brand and the other authors in *Development Dialogue*, things had definitely turned nastier: more porous, undetectable, territorial, and repressive out of class survival. It’s a place of “broad strategy on the part of economic, political and cultural (and sometimes military) elites to destroy the (peripheral) Fordist compromises and to restructure power relations, institutions, overall orientations and truths, in particular societies and at the international level, even more towards capitalist interests.”

Russia and, certainly, China are the models upon which a post-neoliberal planet sustains itself, especially as resources become even scarcer. In this post-neoliberal dreamscape (and unlike in *Lathe*, there are no cute turtle aliens to remind us of our simple humanity), the power consolidators, as Harvey noted in a 2009 *Counterpunch* article, have efficiently transformed the “word government into the word ‘governance’, making governmental and corporate activities porous.” Echoing George Orr’s plea to stop the dreams, the authors in *Development Dialogue* suggest we begin with *real* programs oriented to *real* systemic crises, and not ones invoked for diversion, to shock into complacency and obedience or lull with dreams that things will turn better.

All the forecasts tell us otherwise. As U.S. Intelligence Czar Dennis Blair, for example, pointed out in a briefing before the U.S. Senate (“Global Slump ‘U.S. Security Threat,’” *BBC*, February 12, 2009), “The primary near-term security concern of the United States is the global economic crisis and its geopolitical implications.” He went on to say, “Economic crises increase the risk of regime-threatening instability if they persist over a one- to two-year period.” Added to the list just recently have been climate change and poverty as destabilizing threats to consumer happiness. Indicators such as unemployment, shifting financial markets, poverty, and lack of credit are now viewed, officially, as troubling incubators for terrorism and not as symptomatic of the inequity of the systems.

Back in the early 1960s when the project of neoliberalism began, Le Guin was aware that when the dream’s unfolding becomes subject to control, desires and aspirations follow — then history, discourse, and finally, memory. This is the outcome of a subtle reification, where, as Adorno informs us, capitalism colonizes every crevice of revolt — those positions of marginality historically sought by outlaws, political refugees, artists, even such dreamers as Orr.

Orr has the classic worker epiphany: “I’m a born tool. I haven’t any destiny. All I have is dreams. And now other people run them” (75). In this post-neoliberal scenario, Timothy Bewes reminds us (in *Reification: or the Anxiety of Late Capitalism*, Verso, 2002), any resistance to the consumer capitalist society is futile. The post-neoliberal enemy is everywhere, Michael Brie tells us in “Ways Out of the Crisis of Neoliberalism”

(*Development Dialogue*), yet nowhere — and we all eventually collapse with exhaustion into a condition of being “poverty refugees” on the high seas, victims of ecological and social catastrophes as well as of state failures in the Third World. Yet like our newly reconfigured identities, there are shadows left in the spaces of history in *Lathe of Heaven* when the augmentor is invoked and Orr dreams. And like George Orr’s female companion *Lelache*, we feel the absence but quickly adapt to the reality that is presented to us. It is a familiar narrative, concocted in the late 1940s when there was real resistance to ideology: to promote our way of life, our democracy, our capitalism, will just simply require more and more control. And who would be against such a tradeoff? In weaving the narrative of our dreams, Haber realizes, you control the past and the future. Yes, Haber says, as he surveys the depopulated, deracialized city of Portland, at the height of his authority, “things were being run very differently, now.”

But Haber cannot sustain the imagination, and *his* dreams soon turn sour. And in that sudden turn to reality lies the hope for George Orr, and for us as well. Near the end of *Lathe*, after the neoliberal urge is tamed and society is back to some sense of its humanity, Orr and *Lelache* decide to visit Haber, less for answers than for resolution. The psychologist has been committed to the Federal Asylum for the Insane, where he spends all his time staring into a void. He finally has clarity and has actually seen — or seems to understand — the world and humanity post-1998. But such a reality is a tad too dystopic for an old neoliberal. “He was looking at the world as misunderstood by the mind; the bad dream,” Le Guin explains, suddenly stepping into the narrative to tell a story. And it is a story about a bird, in the poem “Burnt Norton,” in Eliot’s *Four Quartets*, who cries out that “mankind cannot bear much reality.” But that’s just a misperception, Le Guin explains, and a common error. “Man can endure the entire weight of the universe for eighty years. It is unreality that he cannot bear.” **FE**

NOTES

For a more in-depth discussion of class power, see David Harvey’s interview with Marco Berlinguer and Hilary Wainwright, December 13, 2008, under the title “The Crisis and Consolidation of Class Power” on davidharvey.org.

Pierre Bourdieu’s piece, “The Essence of Neoliberalism,” appeared in the December 1998 issue of *Le Monde*. Italics in the original.

The Moyers interview is included on the 1980 DVD, but segments of it are also available on Youtube.

In “Burnt Norton,” it is human kind, and not mankind, that cannot bear very much reality Elliot further reminds us that “Time past and time future/What might have been and what has been/Point to one end, which is always present.”

Forever the Day Before

ANDY SUNFROG

Ursula Le Guin was already 45 when her well-known anarchist text *The Dispossessed* was published in 1974. Today, she's almost a decade older than the unlikely shero of Laia Odo, the feisty matron who wrote the core theoretical texts that shape the anarchist society described in the "ambiguous utopia" of the novel. The short story as prequel called "The Day Before the Revolution" discusses Odo in her later years, preparing to die before her dream gets realized.

Respect for one's elders is not central to the cultural anarchy many of us got reared on. For too many, age in years equals authority instead of wisdom, and an anarchism of pure impulse might unduly ignore the experience extended to us by our elders in the radical community. Many of our elders are veterans of the failed anarchist revolutions of the twentieth century. Some have already passed away, and those remaining with us will not live forever, will likely die before they see a successful anarchist revolution. What does it feel like to live before the revolution? Will we always live before the revolution? What might Odo, Le Guin, and our other activist elders teach us about living forever on the eve of the revolution?

In the time after the revolution, in *The Dispossessed*, the dream is realized deliberately and delicately and remains so distant that it must reside on a different planet. And the novel's protagonist, a scientist of intergalactic renown, rebels against the cooperative utopia by traveling by spaceship to the capitalist mother planet. While it's strange and beautiful to see a society practice cooperation as the norm, we're more familiar with the life of the protagonists in the prequel, people for whom "all the friends" are "in all the jails."

In both "The Day Before" and *The Dispossessed*, anarchists recognize the price of their path—dealing with prisons and repression before the revolution and exile on a desolate planet to harvest the fruits of the revolution. Le Guin's fictional anarchisms intentionally reveal flaws and imperfections, and while clearly anarchist societies of the communal, left-wing variety, they nonetheless portray a passionate asceticism, a conservative mood of selfless austerity.

Odo owns nothing but her body. Her possessions are few, and her only treasures are her ideas; these, of course, she gives away for free. The primary aphorism of anarchist wisdom in "The Day Before" is a line about taking personal responsibility that could easily have been spouted by one of today's cultural conservatives.

But both Odo and the scientist Shevek in *The Dispossessed*

are "bad anarchists" and benefactors of individual notoriety, even fame. When Laia Odo utters a politically incorrect term, she mocks herself: "why in the hell did she have to be a good Odonian."

"The Day Before the Revolution" causes me to crave respect for our anarchist elders, for the Odo among us. "The Day Before the Revolution" reminds me how many revolutionaries die before the revolution. But because history has taught us over and again the horrors of what happens "after the revolution," this day before—which is our day before—ultimately suggests that it is always the day before any revolution that is worth what we are fighting for.

Is it better to grow old living and yearning for an unrealized ideal you believe in, than to always settle for what is?

Might we learn from the allegedly successful so-called revolutions of the last century that sometimes the time before the revolution has its advantages? How might we square a compassionate patience with ourselves to our impatience

with a dispassionate society?

To relish wanting and waiting for revolution is not to accept or prolong the injustices of the present order, but rather, to remind ourselves that the hunger of a noble yearning often breeds more cooperative behavior than the satiety of a bloody victory does. Before the revolution, we are a human fraternity of equals, each striving for something better. After the revolution as played out in history, we are appointed to positions of power to protect and preserve the status quo. Appetite and anticipation season the palate for satiation. "The Day Before The Revolution" describes the hunger of youth, the hunger of old age, the hunger of the ages and the age, thirsty as we must be, like Odo and Le Guin, for peace and freedom and participatory justice.

In her introduction to "The Day Before The Revolution," Le Guin does not describe anarchism as a perfect or superior political philosophy, only as the most "idealistic" and most "interesting." Perhaps "winning" revolutions would not be as interesting as wanting freedoms, of keeping our ideals intact without turning our ideals—even anarchism—into mere idols.

Thinking of Laia Odo and Ursula K. Le Guin in our day, at the dawn of yet another decade, the day after many past revolutions and the day before many future ones, let's be like the anarchists of these stories, always seeking and questioning, never owning much more than our ideals and practicing them the day before, the day after, and most of all, today. **FE**

Queerly Erotic: An Open Love Letter to Ursula Le Guin

DRAWING: LOU BLASI

Dear Ursula,

This is the first love letter I've written to an 80-year-old woman. Most of the people I have fallen in love with, or in lust with, have been men. And so far, all of them have been at least 30 years younger than you. Nor is this love like that I feel for my grandmothers, nearer to you in age and gender. In many ways, I feel closer to you. They have not been so forthcoming with their own stories. I suppose they've learned not to be, in a culture that often ignores old women. Nor have they had many chances to speak to me, nor I to listen. Unlike most in human history, my culture is carefully segregated by age. You have reminded me of this oddity in your own fragments of anarchist anthropology.

No, my relationship with your writing is different. This love is queerly erotic. Not straightforwardly erotic in that narrow sense of genital or sexual pleasure. Erotic as used by feminists such as Audre Lorde, Shulamith Firestone, Chaia Heller, or yourself: a profoundly joyful awareness of being alive. Even when it hurts. Pleasure and power: diffuse, decentralised. Reading your writing helps me to connect with that awareness. For this, I am deeply grateful.

I've been inspired, too, by how queerly you manage to do this. I'm thinking here of the Germanic origin of the word—*quer*, to cross—and how it's been taken up by activists and scholars (and activist-scholars) to mean that which crosses, blurs, undermines or overflows supposed borders, not least between hetero- and homo-sexualities. With a gender-fluid love story (*The Left Hand of Darkness*), tales of love and resistance in a bisexual polyamorous culture (*The Birthday of*

the World and Other Stories), or the gender-free erotic imagery of amoeba sex, sunlight on skin, dancer's feet (*The Wave in the Mind*) and of other animal bodies (e.g., "She Unnames Them"), you've queered gender, sexuality, species, and eroticism. What gifts!

Politics, too, you have queered. Your anarchism is neither straightforward nor straight. It curves and flows, spirals and eddies. Overflowing separations of love and revolution, politics and spirituality, listening and telling, the possibilities you invite cannot be contained by any singular understanding, by any border. You've refused, too, that moral border between the good anarchist and the evil archist.

In recent interviews, you suggested that perhaps you don't qualify for the label anarchist because you are middle-class or because what you do isn't activism. I invite you to reconsider. Who needs activism when you have *wu wei*? And why not be a middle-class anarchist? This is no contradiction in my book—and your own books have never shied away from life's apparent contradictions. They are embraced, queered.

The stories, essays, and poems you've written have served as much-needed guides, helping me learn to imagine my own life. With this help and the help of others, I become better able to act as a guide myself: to write and speak, to listen and act in ways that help others to imagine theirs. Whether or not you call yourself an anarchist, you've helped me to deepen my own understanding of what an anarchist can be, can do. Of what I can do. Of who I can become.

For this, I feel the most abiding love.

—Jamie Heckert



A Long Overdue Thank You Letter

Dear Ursula,

I've been intending to write to you for ages, to thank you for the innumerable ways that your words have inspired, informed, supported, and challenged me over the past thirty-six years. Now that you're turning eighty, I think it's a good time to write that letter.

I first met you in 1973, in a room behind a little macrobiotic restaurant, called Peace Food, in West Berlin. I was twenty-one and in training to become a full-time worker for an Eastern spiritual organization. Our trainer would read to us from *The Wizard of Earthsea*, thinking, I suppose, that it was relevant to us as spiritual workers in training. It reminded me that I'd always known I was a wizard, as a faerie child talking to faeries in the woods of Britain and making sticks into magic wands. Of the many ideas in that book that resonated with my being, what stayed with me was the importance of the healing power of embracing and integrating one's own shadow—one's whole self—which became and remains central to my way of understanding myself and the world.

For the next six years, I was busy absorbing the teachings of and working for that organization and its Indian guru, and I don't recall coming across any more of your books until the organization sent me to the United States in 1979 to teach yoga and meditation. On my arrival in South Carolina, one of the first books I encountered was *The Dispossessed*. I'd always considered myself an anarchist, and you showed me a vision of what a world that practiced anarchist principles might look like. Once again, you offered no simplistic, Utopian solutions but always the complex questions. Years later, "The Day Before the Revolution" expanded my understanding of the possibilities of how radical social change might come about—how it might be much closer than we imagine.

Having rediscovered you, I picked up your books wherever I found them, on my travels all over North America in the 1980s, often devouring them without putting them down. The next two books of the (then) Earthsea trilogy, *The Tombs of Atuan* and *The Farthest Shore*, helped to deepen my understanding of the subtleties and potential dangers of working with spiritual power. Your bold questioning and challenging of many of the assumptions of the dominant culture provided a counter-balance to my little bubble of ideological certainty. The essential ideas that I gleaned from your work played a big part in preserving my core integrity and essential identity, so that when I emerged from the "cult" in 1991, I had a strong foundation on which to begin reconstructing my life.

By then, I'd read everything I could find that you'd written,

and I have continued to read your work as it's published. Often, what you explore parallels my journeys of self-discovery and leads me to deeper and wider questions. This year, *Lavinia* is creating an opening for a conversation with my father, the classical scholar who used to read to us from Homer, about everyday life in the times of those heroic wars.

Always Coming Home is still the most complete and believable vision I've found of a practical, possible, sustainable culture. I practice re-reading it once a year and recommend it to everyone I know who's engaged in trying to build a saner world. I often dip into it for inspiration, as I move steadily closer to living sustainably and co-creating a movement for sustainable culture.

I became a practitioner of Deep Ecology and the Council of All Beings in the '90s, and once again, your work asked deeper questions and offered possibilities of more profound connections. *The Word for World is Forest* articulated the indigenous worldview of the interdependence of humans and "nature" in a way that I could immediately grok. As a lifelong tree lover, I draw inspiration from your profound love and understanding of the wisdom of trees and feel like we're kindred spirits in yet another area of our lives. *Buffalo Gals* has been another of my favorite places to go for reminders of my Deep Ecological awareness, my ecological identity.

I'm not good at memorizing, but I have managed to memorize two of your poems, which capture two of my core beliefs. The first (from *Always Coming Home*) sums up the essence of Deep Ecology beautifully:

A Poem Said with the Drum

By Kulkunna of Chukulmas

*The hawk turns crying, gyring.
There is a tick stuck in my scalp.
If I soar with the hawk
I have to suck with the tick.
O hills of my Valley, you are too complicated!*

The second (from *Wild Oats and Fireweed*) articulates the essence of magic:

Spell

*An unknotting.
A disbraidment.
A great magic—
What is magic?*

I release me.

I carry both with me, to remind my friends and me of what's essential.

When I started reconnecting with my wounded inner child, you offered me *Tehanu*, with its deeper wisdom about the profound relationships between wounds and healing power—and dragons. I identify strongly with being born in the year of the dragon and love your exploration of our ancient intertwined history as humans and dragons, both civilized and wild. *Tehanu*, too, I re-read regularly, always finding more as my experience deepens my ability to understand.

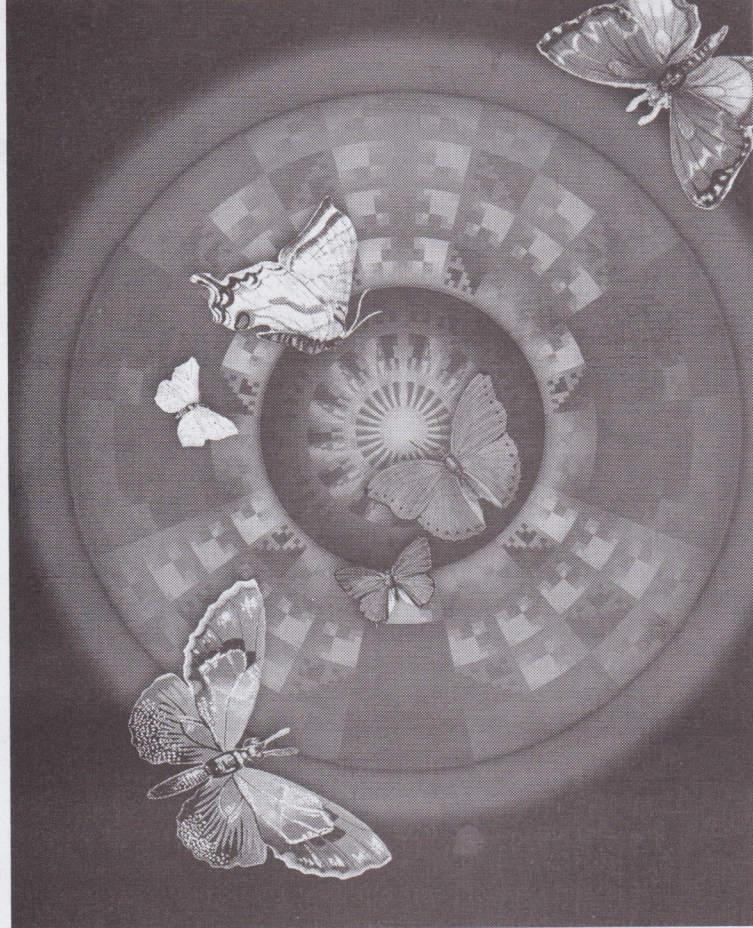
I've called myself a feminist ever since I discovered the word (in the '70s), and your writing has always challenged me to look more deeply at what feminism really means, in theory and in practice. You don't hesitate to tell it like it is, with full awareness that many human males will not be able to hear what you're saying—as you so powerfully and subtly point out in *Tehanu*. We have so far to go, and your voice keeps reminding us not to get complacent or believe them when they tell us how equal we are.

When I first read *The Left Hand of Darkness*, I called myself bisexual, and found support in your “thought experiment” of humans as essentially androgynous and bi-attractional. In recent years, since coming out as Transgender—which in my case means neither man nor woman—I keep returning to that book, and your various commentaries on it, looking to deepen my understanding of gender and sexuality. Thank you for keeping an open mind about gender-neutral pronouns, and, as always, being willing to take the discussion further. I imagine writing—stepping further through the door you opened—about a world where each person's gender is unique, as is each person's way of being sexually attracted and expressing that attraction. Perhaps you'll write about it before I do.

Your suggestion that science fiction can be a kind of thought experiment has inspired me to create a thought experiment of my own. I call it the Gender Diversity Game. In the Game, we set up a playing field, divided sideways and length-wise, into male/female and masculine/feminine. The field represents an imaginary culture where—despite their enormous biological and individual diversity, very much like ours—they structure their identities and institutions on the assumption that there are only two kinds of people: “boys/men” (masculine males) and “girls/women” (feminine females). You can imagine how it proceeds.

I've always been a dreamer, and, lately, have been learning to practice conscious dreaming and creating my life by manifesting my dreams. *The Lathe of Heaven* gives me deeper insight into that process and warns me to be very careful and precise about what I dream! Of course, it also reminds us to be cautious about imposing simplistic solutions on complex (read: living) situations.

For extended periods of my adult life I've lived in various kinds of intentional communities, and many of your stories—*Always Coming Home*, of course—have inspired and informed us. I'm thinking particularly of *Vaster than Empires and More Slow*, which so accurately and hilariously portrays the interactions within groups of “crazy” characters who dare to explore the far reaches of the social universe in search of



workable ways of living. I'm about to embark on yet another journey into that realm and am taking your books with me as essential reading.

Most recently, as I become more polyamorous in practice, I've rediscovered that you've already been there too (of course) and have a fresh perspective to offer. The world you describe in *Mountain Ways* expresses my current situation almost exactly—reversed, of course, as is so often your way of pointing things out to us. (In twenty-first-century North America, people judge me for not being a serial monogamist, not for being the wrong kind of polyamorous.) Still, the questions you raise, of how to stay true to oneself and the people one loves in the face of social customs and taboos, applies.

Now, as a budding writer, sometimes doubting whether what I have to write will make any difference in the world, I only have to remember what a huge difference your words have made in the life of this reader, for all my doubts to be dispelled.

I hope you'll stick around for quite a while yet and keep challenging us and shaking us out of our complacency. I'll miss your fresh words when you're no longer writing, and I'll be surprised if I don't keep hearing your voice, reminding me to ask the deeper questions and challenge all the assumptions of the old culture.

All of what I've written could really fit into two words: “Thank you.”

— Oshee Eagleheart

IMAGE: TAMMY WEITZEL

Book Reviews

Ursula K. Le Guin, *A Ride on the Red Mare's Back*. Illustrated by Julie Downing. New York: Orchard Books, 1992.

DON LACOSS

During a trip to Sweden in the 1980s, a friend gave Ursula Le Guin a small, red-painted wooden horse. This sort of figurine—called a *Dalahäst*, or “Dala Horse”—is a Swedish folk-art tradition that is at least four centuries old and is associated with the Dalarna region of central Sweden near the Norwegian border, and it fired Le Guin’s imagination.

Popular belief has it that the red horses originated in those villages in Dalarna, well known for hand-carved clock-casings and furniture. It is believed that the horses were originally meant as toys; they were whittled with a knife from scrap pine wood at night as the family gathered around the blazing fire during the cold, dark winter months. Its distinctive colors, along with other decorative elements (painted flower garlands, bridles and saddles), are closely related to the furniture designs from those villages. The toys became very popular and soon evolved into a cottage-industry where they were bartered by rural families for household necessities in the larger cities.

Le Guin was fascinated by her Dala Horse and began to research it. Because of its popularity in Sweden, she said, she had assumed that there were many legends associated with the small red wooden horses. But despite the fact that Pagan horse-worship in pre-Christian Northern Europe had been quite widespread and difficult to eradicate (horse imagery was used as damning evidence in Scandinavian witch-trials well into the seventeenth century), Le Guin could find no definitive connection between the toy horses and folklore. Le Guin says that this dearth inspired her to create

her own myth for the Dala Horse, and this is what became the children’s book *A Ride on the Red Mare's Back*.

This haunting story is set on the first day of winter in a remote, snow-blanketed forest of the north “a long time ago, when the world was wild.” It concerns a nameless young girl’s quest to rescue her little brother, who was kidnapped by trolls while out hunting with his father. Since her mother has to stay in the small cottage to care for a newborn baby and her traumatized father can only stare into the fire and nurse his bruises from the troll attack, the girl resolutely decides that it is her job to find the stolen child. She does so with the simple focus and clarity of a child’s logic: she bundles up against the cold and the dark, packs a ball of yarn, a pair of wooden knitting needles, the red scarf that she was making her brother, a warm loaf of her mother’s freshly-baked bread, and her toy horse, and she slips out into the wilderness without telling her parents what she intends to do.

Initially, the girl takes the red horse—her only toy, carved and painted by her father—to help her screw up her courage and to fight off doubt and loneliness. But she soon learns that the horse has some supernatural properties: during her first encounter with a troll, the red mare grows to full size, speaks to her, and carries her off through the deep snow to the trolls’ “High House” in a faraway mountain cavern. But the mare’s magic is not of the omnipotent variety, and the horse tells the girl that she needs to rely on her own daring and wits to rescue her brother. Indeed, the trials that the girl faces (including an unpleasant surprise when she finally locates her sibling) are not overcome through magic or violence, but through resourcefulness, pluck, and the few common items that she had brought with her.

It’s difficult for me to say for what age group this book is intended—somewhere between five and twelve, I’m guessing. *A Ride on the Red Mare's Back* runs about 30 pages of 14-point type divided into five chapters with about a dozen or so large illustrations, lots of white space, and wide margins framed by traditional designs of tree branches and flower blossoms;

Continued on page 36

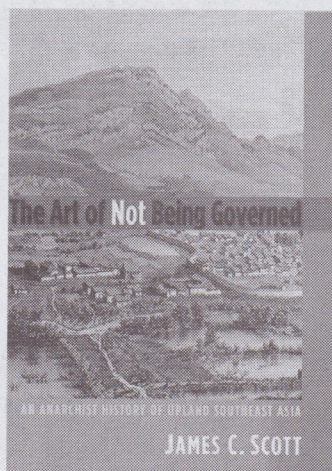


PHOTO: RICK STRICKLAND



James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*. Yale University Press, 2009, cloth, 442 pp., \$35

PETER LAMBORN WILSON



How could any black-&-red-blooded anarchist resist a book with this title?

Admittedly, it's an expensive treat, but I'm very glad at last to discover a writer I should already have known: James C. Scott, who (like David Graeber) is an anthropologist at Yale and a self-confessed anarchist.

The thesis here is similar to the idea I developed in "The Shamanic Trace" (in *Escape from the Nineteenth Century*, Autonomedia, 1998), namely, that many present-

day hunter/gatherer and primitive horticulturalist societies have, at some time, *reverted* to these "earlier" economic systems, progressing backward, so to speak, in order to escape the authoritarian State structure inherent in agricultural and industrial economies.

Scott would go further, however; he suggests that there's no such thing as "the tribe," and that all "primitive" societies are always already engaged in *escaping* from the State. I love this use of the word escape—the escapism of a Houdini ("Love laughs at locksmiths").

Scott uses the brilliant French anarchist anthropologist Pierre Clastres as the foundation for a re-appraisal of the old ethnographic masterpiece, Edmund Leach's *The Political Systems of Highland Burma* (1954), using masses of material on the various anthropologies of a region famous for its "tribal insurrections" and messianic movements.

The key to escape from the agricultural state in the Southeast Asian highlands and jungles is "swidden" (slash-and-burn) horticulture, which keeps the people mobile and self-sufficient. Swidden supports a lot of hunting and gathering, too, which leads to even more freedom.

In the most daring chapter of this work, Scott goes so far as to suggest that many "pre-literate" peoples may actually be *post-literate*, having given up textuality as a form of cognitive oppression. A brilliant notion!

Despite a tendency to rely on anthropological terminology and to repeat himself unnecessarily, Scott has clearly fled the flatlands of academe and its vague Enlightenment-humanist consensus for the uplands of chaos, adventure, escapism and anarchy. I hope never to hear that Scott is "in trouble at Yale"—even though I'd only admire him even more. **FE**

RED MARE, *continued from page 34*

it's still a bit text-heavy for younger audiences, but the read-aloud cadences are pitch-perfect. Le Guin tells the story in a spare, simple, and straight-forward way, but like so many fables and fairy tales, there is still plenty of room for readers' own interpretation of events. At an impromptu reading of the book that I gave last October in a neighborhood schoolyard at recess, a dozen or so children between the ages of five and seven were swept up in the tale; they peppered me with questions about whether or not the girl was frightened and how it was that she was able to figure out what she needed to do in order to save her brother. They all feared for the horse's safety when the trolls pursued the mare, and they wanted to closely study Julie Downing's watercolor illustrations, eager to get a good look at the trolls, to stare at the magnificent red mare, and to spot clues that would unearth the secrets of the young heroine's success.

There is much to admire and enjoy in *A Ride on the Red Mare's Back*. Obviously, a tale about a courageous, clever, and independent girl who faces dire challenges with gumption and imagination—be it Lewis Carroll's Alice, Astrid Lindgren's Pippi Longstocking, or Neil Gaiman's Coraline—would instinctively appeal to majority of *Fifth Estate* readers. But the story of Le Guin's effort to create her own folktale for the Dala Horse is as inspirational as the story she tells of the young girl who saves her brother from the trolls of High House.

As Angela Carter's amazing work on translating, writing, and reconfiguring fairy tales has shown, relevant and radically critical ideas are investigated in do-it-yourself mythmaking just as they are in utopian writings. Every day we are all bombarded by competing narratives (philosophical, religious, socio-political, commercial, techno-scientific) that try to explain and explore the complexities of the world and human experience; rather than choosing one of these prefabricated "just-so" story to surrender to, perhaps we should be energizing our imagination to create our own highly personalized collection of fables, tall tales, and enchanted histories of everyday objects, just as Le Guin has done here. There is, of course, no need to believe these stories—I've probably been reading Greek myths since I was nine, and I have yet to begin devoutly worshipping Poseidon—but instead to enjoy them as previous attempts by a people to craft their own ethical and existential place in the world. Mythological thinking charts the efforts of ancients to probe the mysteries of behavior, of social order, and of the inner realities of perception and thought, all of which are struggles that remain very relevant to many of us to this day.

Like Alan Lomax's recordings of Mississippi chain-gang chants and sharecropper field songs, the traditional children's stories, "household tales," and Teutonic mythology compiled by the nineteenth-century Romantic philologists Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm were meant to preserve a world that was disappearing. In the case of the Brothers Grimm, they were trying to preserve remnants of pre-Christian, pre-industrial German culture that was being crushed by the rapid transformation of the German middle-classes and its consolidation of power. These new capitalist formations were armed with

new myths: the sanctity of the patriarchal family, economic independence, Enlightened progress, Prussian nationalism, the spiritual satisfactions of elite high culture, and militarist modernity. Although they eventually bowdlerized their folktales to fit contemporary bourgeois values and aspirations, the initial impetus for the Grimms' project was to offer a "natural poetry" alternative to the unhappy changes that they saw going on around them daily. Collecting old tales is one way that the Romantics did this; creating them yourself (William Blake, for example) is another.

"We live in an age in which myths are crumbling," the Egyptian surrealist Ramsis Yūnān wrote from within the historical context of Nasser's secular, authoritarian technocratic modernization project. "This has happened not because science has taken the place of old wives' tales, but because people have stopped believing in these old legends of 'absolute knowledge.'" He continues:

A real myth acts like a compass and fulfills various roles in defining human existence and fixing a place among the various

hidden and apparent forces of the universe. It reveals human origins and fate and maps out the course of action and goals. It explains dreams and thereby fulfills everything that the heart, mind, and imagination might wish for.... The origins of myth are completely unimportant; the only importance of myth is to fill emptiness in the soul and to act as a fertile ground for light and inspiration to grow. Accordingly, there are no essential differences between the roles played by Isis and Osiris in ancient Egypt, the role played by the concept of Tao in China, or the roles played by both the Virgin Mother and the Third Dimension in the art of Renaissance Italy.

Le Guin's *A Ride on the Red Mare's Back* provides an engrossing and enjoyable story, but it also serves as a study in the critical functions of mythopoeia. To quote Yūnān, Le Guin's simple neo-folktale provides "fertile ground" for the developing new strategies for problem-solving and new models of autonomy that lie outside of the channels of today's mass-mediated myths. Its ability to encourage others to construct fables of their own is its most precious gift. **FE**

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1. Clear What-and-Why Logic: A simple rationale for the mass action that makes sense to people. Direct Action Network wrote, "We are planning a large-scale, well-organized, high-visibility action to SHUT DOWN the World Trade Organization on Tuesday, November 30. The World Trade Organization has no right to make undemocratic, unaccountable, destructive decisions about our lives, our communities, and the earth. We will nonviolently and creatively block them from meeting."

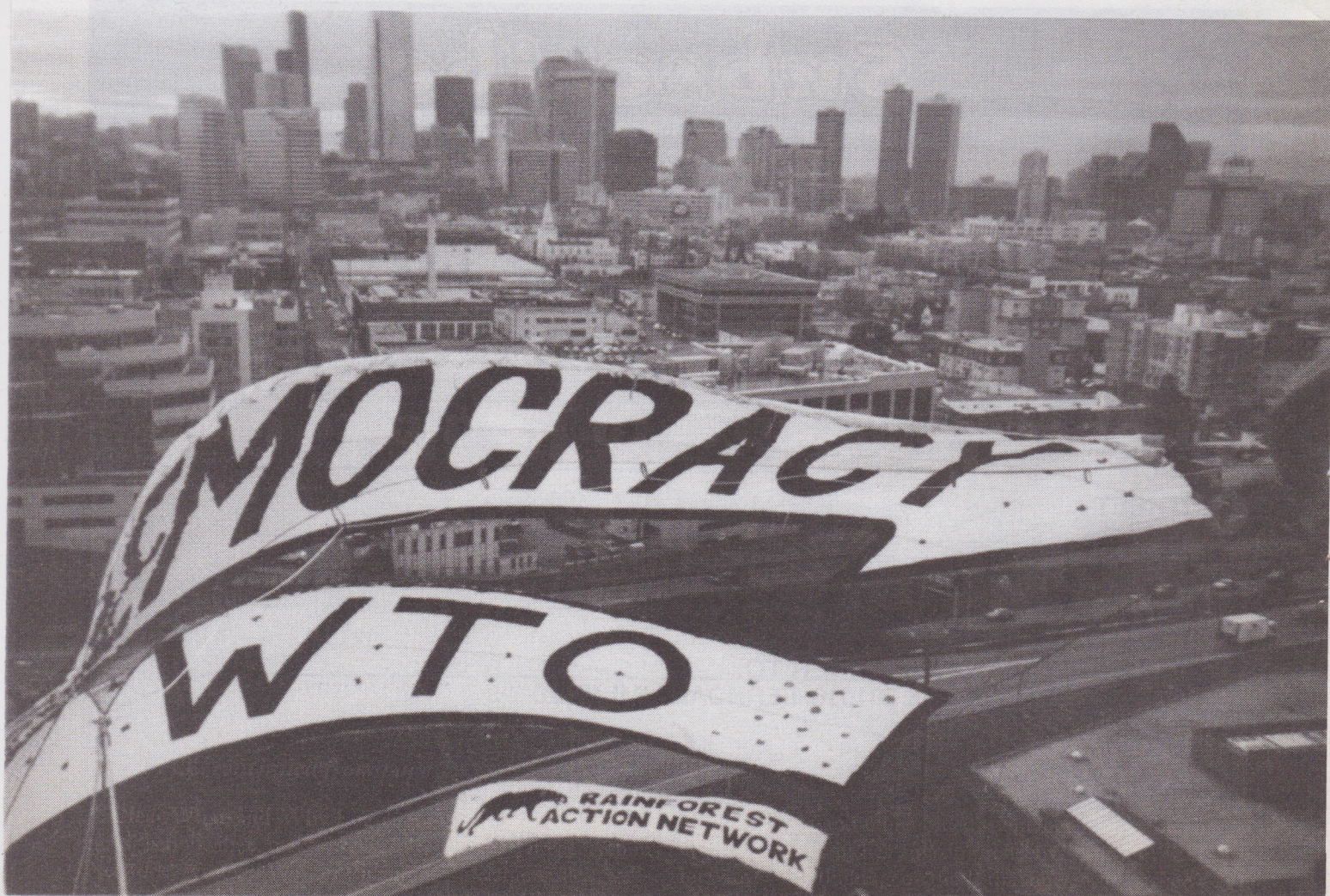
2. Broadly Publicized: Lead-up actions, press conferences, a widely-distributed broadsheet newspaper, nearly 100,000 color postcards, a massively visited Web site, widespread emailing of our call to action and action info, a West Coast performance/education/training road show and broad regional and North American mobilizing made sure many people knew what was planned, why, and how to prepare and plug-in.

3. Mass Training and Mass Organization: Perhaps two thousand people received nonviolent direct-action and related trainings in the days and weeks leading up to the action, and in communities up and down the Western U.S. one thousand people were directly involved in the organizing through affinity groups and clusters, working groups, and public meetings. This training and organization was the foundation

on which thousand more joined spontaneously. As Stephanie Guilloud writes in her amazing reflective essay, "10 Lessons for Movement Building on the 10th Anniversary of the WTO Shutdown," "They came out of the bars: infrastructure and preparation allows for spontaneous action."

4. Decentralization: A wide range of participating groups and individuals helped to shape, understood, and supported the basic strategy and agreements. At the core of the action were many self-reliant affinity groups who organized into clusters, thus the core action participants were well-organized, able to be flexible and make quick decisions, and respond easily to changes. This meant that the action was less vulnerable to repression or disruption, and that when some organizers were arrested, others stepped up.

5. Action Agreements: The groups and activists of the Direct Action Network made some basic agreements early on about what types of mass action would best shut down the WTO and would create a space that could involve a wide diversity of participants, because we would need hundreds or even thousands to shut down the WTO. We agreed that we would organize ourselves in affinity groups who would coordinate in a spokescouncil and that we would support and prepare for jail solidarity. We agreed that the direct action blockades would be





nonviolent, and would not include property destruction (except for moving objects as blockades). Voluntary agreements are the foundation of any collective project and are the basis of trust for alliances of different people and organizations.

In the wake of Seattle, parts of the anarchist and anti-capitalist scene adopted and strongly promoted a “diversity of tactics” framework, which in practice means refusing to discuss which tactics are or are not strategic and refusing to make agreements about which tactics would or would not be used at an action. It was seen as a pushback against the rigidity of “nonviolence” with all its baggage, allowing more space for property destruction and street fighting with—or fighting as self-defense against—cops. In recent years diversity of tactics advocates have initiated mutual respect agreements (the St Paul Principles and the Pittsburgh Principles) between different organizing groups around time and location of demonstrations and not publicly criticizing each other.

Most movements around the world, nonviolent or not, discuss strategy, make agreements about which tactics are strategic, and organize to follow those agreements. Where diversity of tactics has replaced action agreements in the US, the effect has been that mass direct actions are less massive, less strategic, less frequent, with less public support, and more vulnerable to infiltration, police provocateurs, repression, corporate media marginalization, and the constituencies participating have become narrower.

6. Open Organizing: We made the decision early on to organize openly and publicly. This was a learned response to government efforts to infiltrate or disrupt past mass actions

and movements, such as the FBI’s COINTELPRO efforts to destroy the New Left, civil rights, and anti-Vietnam war movements. If a group’s plans for mass actions or demonstrations are public and open, it is less vulnerable to government infiltrators or informants and its plans are not ruined if they are found out. It also makes group members less susceptible to the goal of government disruption, which is, in the words of one FBI Agent quoted by Brian Glick in his book *War at Home* (1989, South End Press): “to make activists think there is a cop behind every telephone pole.”

Our basic plan, to march on and blockade the WTO on the opening morning of their Ministerial, was very public, printed on tens of thousands of outreach postcards and broadsheets, and even on the front page of the *Seattle Times*.

Keeping planning secret, or adopting a “security culture” that can make a group more insecure and unwelcoming, works against the need to involve large numbers of empowered people and to have open democratic decision-making. Small self-reliant affinity groups of five to twenty-five people as the basic planning and decision-making bodies of the action can create an element of surprise or spontaneity.

In Seattle affinity groups formed into clusters to take on blockading the thirteen “pie slices” that downtown Seattle around the WTO had been divided into; and some remained mobile. How, where and when each affinity group or cluster would blockade was an element of surprise.

7. Media and Framing: Direct Action Network aggressively communicated in plain language to participants; to movements; and to the public through our own printed

materials, website, emails, road shows; and to both independent and corporate media what we were planning and why and what was wrong with the WTO. Because of this major effort to tell our story, and despite corporate media efforts to weaken public support for our direct actions, a month later, a January 2000 opinion poll by *Business Week* found that 52 percent of US people sympathized with the protestors at the WTO in Seattle. Too often, a healthy, radical critique of the corporate media leads to groups deciding to not even try to engage with them, standing by while they get beaten up in the mainstream press and in public opinion, and sometimes barely making the effort to communicate through independent media or directly through their own media and outreach. Yes, the corporate media, like the police, are instruments of control, but would you stand by and not protect yourself against a cop's club because their authority is illegitimate?

These principles worked for a strong well-organized mass action mobilization, with public support, to shut down one city for a day. What would it take to do this in more than one city, for more than one day, and with increasing public participation and support?

FE

David Solnit is the co-author, with his sister Rebecca Solnit and Chris Dixon, of The Battle of the Story of the Battle of Seattle (AK Press), the editor of Globalize Liberation; and the co-author, with Aimee Allison, of Army of None.

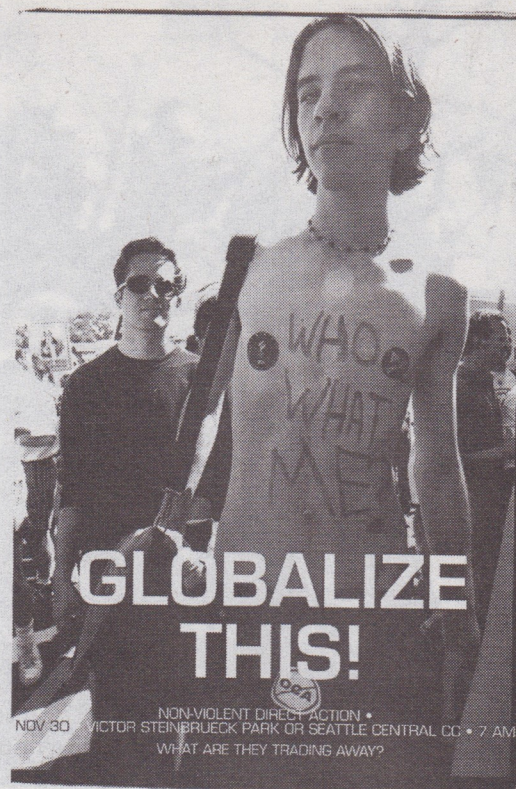


PHOTO & DESIGN FOR "GLOBALIZE THIS" POSTER: DANA SCHUERHOLZ



N30 Seattle '99

♂sss

Update on the Case of Marie Mason

FE Note: Most of the following information on Marie Mason is from the web site supportmariemason.org. Check for updates.

Marie, a long-time *Fifth Estate* contributor, was sentenced in February 2009 to almost 22 years in prison following a guilty plea for two acts of property destruction. She is currently an inmate at the Waseca, Minnesota federal correctional institution, serving the longest sentence of any Green Scare arrestee. (See *Fifth Estate* Spring and Summer 2009 editions.) These are available at the *FE* web site.

Mostly, Marie has been trying to adjust to life at Waseca. The good news is that she was initially assigned a job in the kitchen but was able to be transferred to a job as a guitar instructor. She teaches group classes and gives individual instruction. The prison folk band she is in was finally approved to play a concert on Columbus Day. They used the opportunity to discuss Native American struggles and Leonard Peltier's incarceration specifically with the audience. Marie wrote that a good portion of the audience was receptive and engaged in a discussion that carried on well after the concert was over.

Unfortunately, Marie's other needs are not being met. Mail delivery has continuously been disrupted. Contact with her appeal lawyer was halted at one point, and he had to intervene to re-establish it. Certain of her supporters were barred from contacting Marie, but then allowed to—only to find their communications were censored or parts of them “lost.”

The worst is her food situation. Marie is vegan, but the prison will not provide meals and she has been forced to buy supplemental food from the commissary. This, predictably, has also caused a problem. There is an excess of money in her commissary account and therefore a monthly amount has been garnished by the government to pay restitution for the property damage as part of her plea bargain.

Supporters are asked not to place money directly in her commissary account, but rather donate funds directly to her family. See below. In a move that has disappointed Marie and her supporters, prison officials notified her that she will not be allowed to use the new email system recently being installed for the use of many federal prisoners. Although other Green Scare prisoners have been afforded this privilege, no explanation was given to Marie for the denial.

Additionally, the prison has implemented a mandatory address list, restricting her to 100 people she can write to, all of whom must be authorized ahead of time. The 100 person list only limits who she can write to; anyone is free to write her, but unless you are on her authorized list, she will not be



FE's Bill Blank, wearing a Free Marie t-shirt, crosses the finish line at the Indianapolis Half-Marathon, Sept. 2009. Shirt and other Marie merch available at freemarie.org.

able to write back. When you receive a letter from her, your letter will have a prison-generated label from the approved correspondents list. This procedure and even the email system is part of a larger inmate surveillance program. Marie's appeal is still underway, and details will be posted as they become available.

Donations to Marie should go to her mother at: Karin Mason, PO Box 352, Stanwood, MI 49346. Write Marie at Marie Mason #04672-061, FCI Waseca, P.O. Box 1731, Waseca, MN 56093. Send her your zines, leaflets, ideas, etc.; she appreciates it all. Correspondence in and out of the prison is monitored. See also freemarie.org for Marie merchandise.

FE

Anarchist Conference in Connecticut Draws 300 from Around the Country

PAUL J. COMEAU

Anarchist activists and academics from around the country gathered at Charter Oak Cultural Center in Hartford, CT November 21st and 22nd for the inaugural conference of the North American Anarchist Studies Network. The schedule pamphlet released by the organizing collective described the vision for both the conference and the network: "this network, and the conference, is a space for the development of 'anarchist studies,' broadly construed, and is meant as a space both for professional as well as grassroots scholars of anarchism." The response to the collective's call for papers was in a word, "overwhelming," with over thirty individual papers, three workshops, and seven panels, crammed into two days. Three hundred people turned out to take part in the two-day event.

The conference kicked off with a compelling talk from Barry Pateman, anarchist historian and Associate Editor of the *Emma Goldman Papers*, who challenged the audience to understand and appreciate history for what it was, and not to use it to justify their own actions in the present. "At least the

best thing we can do is to be brutally honest about the truth of our own ideas and our own practices," Pateman said. Though he called on all present to think critically and criticized the "cherry-picking" of history to defend contemporary anarchist positions, Pateman's overall message was a very positive one:

I'm rather hopeful that eventually my research will be irrelevant. I have this great belief one day, that all anarchists will disappear, certainly I hope all activists disappear very quickly, and in fact people [will] just take over and we become an anarchist society by people who have probably never read a word of Proudhon, Stirner, or Kropotkin in their lives.

Pateman's message set the tone for the entire weekend of papers, panels, and workshops. After Pateman's introductory talk, paper presentations, panels, and workshops happened simultaneously throughout the two days in three separate spaces in the cultural center building. The panels covered such topics as "Anarchism and Philosophy," "Queering Anarchism," and "What is Anarchist Studies?" and paper presentations featured topics on anarchist archeology, narratives of entrance into Anarcho-punk, and other topics. A diverse array of other interesting and compelling panels, presentations, and workshops happened throughout the conference.

In a nice break from the mostly serious discussions of the panels, workshops, and presentations, Saturday night featured a performance of Howard Zinn's "Emma," his play based on the life of Emma Goldman. A local ad hoc radical theater troupe produced the play, and despite few of the actors having had any previous acting experience, they put on an excellent performance.

Sixteen organizations and publications were present tabling throughout the venue location for the weekend of the conference. They included *Fifth Estate*, *Anarchy! Journal*, the Transformative Studies Institute, Workers Solidarity Alliance, the Institute for Anarchist Studies, and others. Many of the tabling organizations and publications gave out free or reduced priced copies of their publications, including *Fifth Estate*, which gave out close to two hundred free copies of assorted back issues.

The weekend wrapped up with an ad hoc assembly to discuss the shape and forward direction of the NAASN, including making the conference an annual event, and the formation of an online group to continue discussions beyond the weekend. **FE**

For more information about the conference or the NAASN, check out the conference website and the discussion group:

<http://naasn.wordpress.com/>

<http://groups.google.com/group/naasn>



Jeff "Free" Luers Freed!



Since the punitive government witch hunt of the Green Scare has commenced, we usually have only apprehensions, snitching, and sentencing on which to report. But, this time it's good news!

Jeff "Free" Luers, political prisoner and environmental activist, was released from prison in Oregon after serving nine and half years. Luers was originally sentenced in 2001 to twenty-two years and eight months for the politically motivated arson of three SUVs at an auto dealership in Eugene.

However, after a long campaign by human rights groups and activists worldwide, an appeals court overturned Luers' original sentence, and reduced it to ten years of confinement.

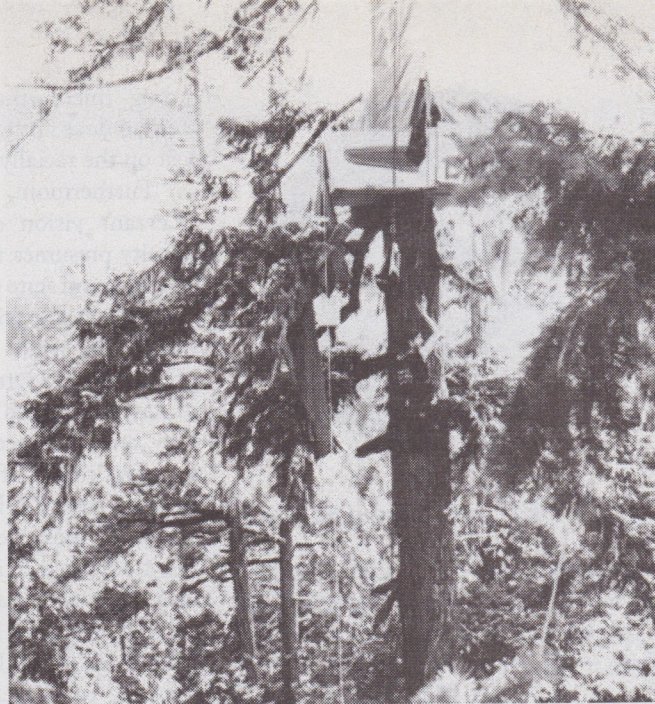
Luers' final discharge follows what the Oregon Department of Corrections described as a "mistake" when he was given an early release in October. After a few short hours of freedom in Eugene, Luers was taken back into custody after a state agency reversed its decision and determined that he did not qualify under the terms of a new law.

This gross official incompetence and the emotional toll borne by his family and loved ones is just one of many examples of the distressing levels of bureaucratic misconduct that Luers has endured during his years behind bars.

Upon his release, Luers stated: "The last nine and a half years have been difficult at best. I have witnessed things in prison that I will carry with me for the rest of my life. I have endured hardship and loss. Without a doubt, this experience has changed me. What hasn't changed is my commitment to environmental and social justice."

He thanked his supporters and pledged to continue his activism. During his time in prison, seven of which were served in maximum security, Luers maintained his political commitment by writing about environmental and social justice issues, particularly human induced climate change, the cause that motivated him to torch the three SUVs in 2000.

Support for Jeff Luers and more information is at freefreenow.org.



Call for Submissions for Next Issue *Belief/Disbelief/Unbelief*

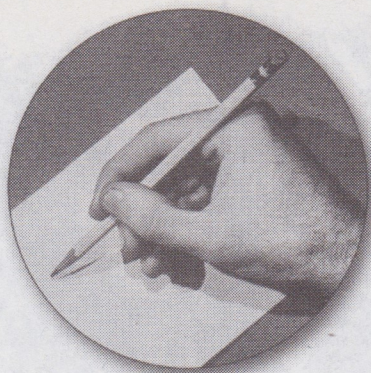
Belief systems—cognitive constructions—determine our perception of reality which can chain us to old ideas or free us with visions that go beyond dominant paradigms. The entire modern era has been one of contestation as to which belief systems will rule in societies—ones that link us to submission and acquiescence to hierarchal authority or those which rebel against them.

We are interested in essays which treat the question of belief from a conceptual and theoretical perspective as well as anecdotes about one's own transformation from accepting dominant beliefs to ones of resistance and rebellion. As an example, we would like to revisit the ideas of Wilhelm Reich and encourage a proposal for one.

We will print a number of small, personalistic essays, 3–400 words maximum, on how and why readers rejected mainstream ideas for those of anarchism, atheism, pacifism, etc.

Please submit manuscripts for short pieces and proposals for longer essays, along with graphics and photographs to: fe@fifthestate.org or POB 201016, Ferndale MI 48220. All formats accepted, including non-mechanical.

Deadline: March 1 — Publication date: April 1



LETTERS, *cont'd from page 4*

on exactly the grounds that Proudhon advocates small-scale capitalism, as opposed to destroying the commodity form itself, as Marx proposed.

(Additionally, Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*—as well as the bulk of the Western Marxist tradition—all include extensive discussions regarding the possibility of nullifying of mediation.) For that matter, I find little talk about "Property" in Zerzan's writings; most of his fury regards the process of abstraction and representation itself.

The problem with Zerzan's distancing of himself from the Left is that the baby goes out with the bathwater. To me, positing oneself on the Left means that, along with anti-capitalism, there is an affirmation of the best aspects of universalism: internationalism, anti-racism, feminism and queer liberation. Zerzan himself upholds these traits, but as he rhetorically distances himself from the Left, many people see him as distancing himself from these elements as well.

Certainly many *nouveaux* fascists do. They use the slogan "Beyond Left and Right" (although this is disingenuous, as their views are readily identifiable as far Right), and they start salivating when they hear white folks like Zerzan denounce the Left.

It should also be noted here that Zerzan has a strangely cosmopolitan view of racial/ethnic identity for someone whose hyper-decentralized "future primitive" world would undoubtedly result in reversions to identities based around tribes or bands. These small group structures would presumably have

strong micro-ethnic identities. While Zerzan does not talk about this, it is not lost on the racially-obsessed far Right.

Furthermore, Todd says that "Zerzan's vision of unmediated community presumes the absence of private property and state power; clearly, fascism is inconceivable without the presence of both." But while these elements were present in the German and Italian forms of fascism which seized State power, they are not necessarily applicable to post-war strains of fascism such as Third Position and the New Right. It is followers of these newer strains (and not the traditional Hitler clones) that are interested in Zerzan.

For example, in 1985, *Fifth Estate* denounced KKK leader Bob Miles for referring to himself as an anarchist. At the same time, Tom Metzger of the White Aryan Resistance denounced capitalism while simultaneously advocating for a white homeland in the Pacific Northwest. In doing so, his organization attracted ex-Wobblies like John Jewell.

And, it does not take much imagination to understand how this demand for a white homeland has, over the years, receded to advocating for stateless—but racially homogenous—all-white communities. Naturally, some of these advocates also wish that property be abolished within these communities. After all, there is a long history of fascist anti-capitalism, even among German Nazi party members such as Otto Strasser.

So, if there is such a great gulf between Zerzan and fascists on the basis of the State and private ownership, then why do they have such interest in him?

Whatever the merits of Zerzan's project are, considering the present circumstances, I wish that he would take precautions to counter the appropriation of his project by these other, disturbing trends, regardless of the reasons for this intersection. Despite their objections, neither Malgraith nor Todd recognize, nor address, this issue.

Spencer Sunshine
New York City

HEMP EATERS KNOW

It was a pleasure to read the *FE*'s piece in the Fall 2009 issue on N.I. Vavilov by Geoff Hall. I just want to point out that he is not such an unknown, unsung hero in the West as your writer implies. Erudite pot-heads have long venerated him for discovering the origins of cannabis in Central Asia (near the origin-place of apples). See, e.g., *Orgies of the Hemp Eaters*, by Bey and Zug, (Autonomedia 2004), p. 633.

And, if you like Vavilov, look for the works of American geographer, Carol O. Sauer, who is similarly inspiring. If I remember correctly, Sauer discovered the origin of chili peppers (Mexico); he's also a beautiful writer.

P.L. Wilson
New Paltz N.Y.

MINOR CARPING

I thought Richard Gilman-Opalsky's, "Freejazz & Other Insurrections," in the Fall 2009 *FE*, was outstanding.

Although I was a little bothered by the experts he relied on, I was educated by the author's distinction between conventional and radical listening, which framed a discussion of linear and less linear music. He makes a good case for the liberatory potential of fringe jazz, while cautioning on the limitations of temporary moments of freedom, such as those experienced at an avant garde concert, in that capital's forces are a constant and, to be bested, would need to be opposed by a constant radicalism.

As to experts, I don't object to the insights of Theodor Adorno, but I wonder why radicals keep looking back to that discussion of jazz and mass media's debasement of listening presented in the 1940s, when more searching accounts have been written since, such as Attali's *Noise* or (closer to home) Cutler's *File Under Culture*, this last title published by Autonomedia.

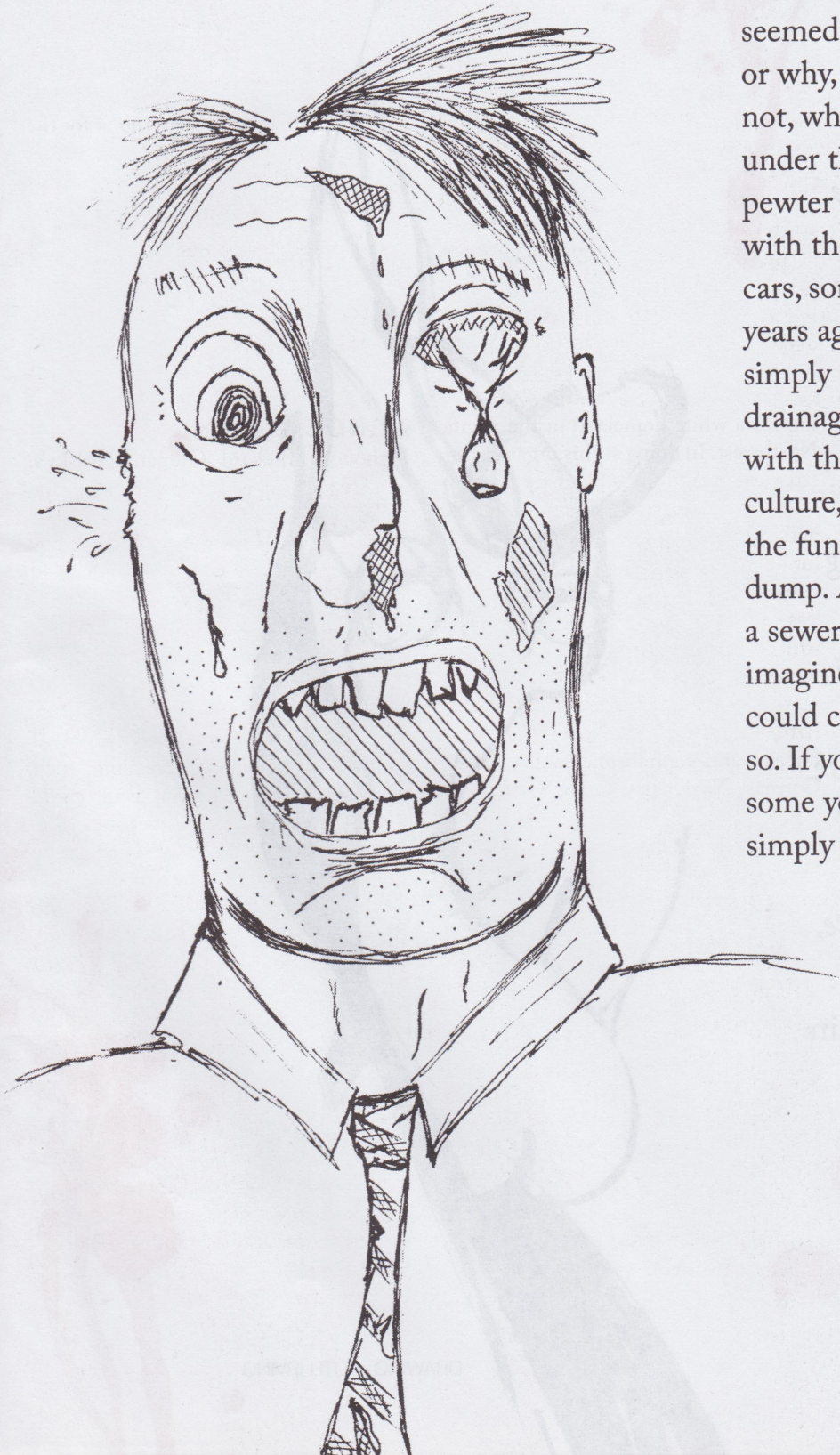
However, this minor carping on my part doesn't detract from the forceful and persuasive argument of the piece.

Jim Feast
New York City

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The Agnes Marsh ditch was hardly twelve feet wide and two feet deep but in it you could sink over your head in mud so foul it could make you puke. Nobody seemed to know when it was dug or why, or if it was natural, or if not, why not. It slid and hissed under the industrial yellow and pewter toned sky, its banks jeweled with the rusted-out hulks of old cars, some which crashed there years ago and some which were simply abandoned. Originally a drainage canal for adjacent farms, with the coming of throwaway culture, the Agnes Marsh took on the function of a neighborhood dump. And it had always been a sewer. The water carried every imagineable disease the locals could conjure. Everyone thought so. If you accidentally swallowed some you retched for weeks simply because you wanted to.

— Carl Watson
from *The Hotel of
Irrevocable Acts*



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"If the attempt to provide a structure that will ensure communitas is impaled on the horns of its own dilemma, might one not abandon the machine model and have a go at the organic—permitting process to determine structure? But to do so is to go even further than the Anarchists, and to risk not only being called but being in fact regressive, politically naive, Luddite, and anti-rational."

—Ursula K. Le Guin



DRAWING: RUTH IRVING